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Diocese of Rochester Catholic Schools

October, 2013

Partners

NEWSLETTER



Staff and students at All Saints Academy, Corning, hold up signs reading "We don't bully. Nothing is stronger than love!" after an assembly introducing the Olweus program.

Schools launch bullying prevention program

By Mark Hare

While there is certainly no epidemic of bullying in Catholic schools across the Diocese of Rochester, "we want to make sure each Catholic school is a nurturing place for students to learn and grow as people of God," Superintendent Anthony Cook wrote in a letter to parents at the start of the school year. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, he wrote, "is the most researched and best known bullying prevention program available today."

The Olweus program will improve an already safe school environment and teach students how to effectively advocate for themselves if they are bullied. The diocese, Cook says, will pay the cost of materials and training.

"It's a very proactive program," says Steve Oberst, principal of St. Pius X School in Chili. He and three other members of the St. Pius staff joined teams from each of the diocesan schools for two-day Olweus training sessions during the summer.

The Olweus program complements the New York State Dignity Act, which took effect in 2012 and requires schools to report and collect data concerning incidents of discrimination and harassment, and to instruct students in civility, citizenship and character development.

Part of our society

"Every teacher and administrator likes to think we don't have the problem," Oberst says. "But that's not realistic. It's part of our society."

It's inevitable, says Joe Tobia, principal of All Saints School in Corning, that students bully others. Olweus engages teachers, administrators, other school staff, parents, volunteers and students in being alert to bullying behavior and how to respond to it.

The Olweus approach establishes clear rules in every school and encourages weekly class meetings during which teachers and students can share their concerns.

During the weekly meetings, says Steve Tartaglia, principal of St. Francis/St. Stephen School in Geneva, "students hear adults talking about their own experiences with bullying behavior. They come to see that these issues are everywhere. Their trust level goes way up."

Adds Tobia, "They will learn great life skills from the program."

Effective intervention and follow-up

The Olweus program trains educators to intervene effectively in bullying situations. When a staff member sees anything that could be bullying behavior, Tartaglia says, they know

what to say and do. They separate the parties and quickly alert others on the school team. Information is collected, parents are notified and follow-up action is set in motion.

Students quickly realize that they should not ignore bullying behavior. They understand that they will be heard and they gain the confidence to speak up when they see bullying-type conduct.

It's essential that students and adults understand the definition of bullying to distinguish problem behavior from garden variety teasing. According to the Olweus website (www.violencepreventionworks.org), "a person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself."

There are many types of bullying behavior, according to Olweus. These include

- verbal bullying
- social exclusion or isolation
- physical bullying
- bullying through lies and false rumors
- having money or other things taken or damaged

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BACK TO SCHOOL



HOLY FAMILY, ELMIRA

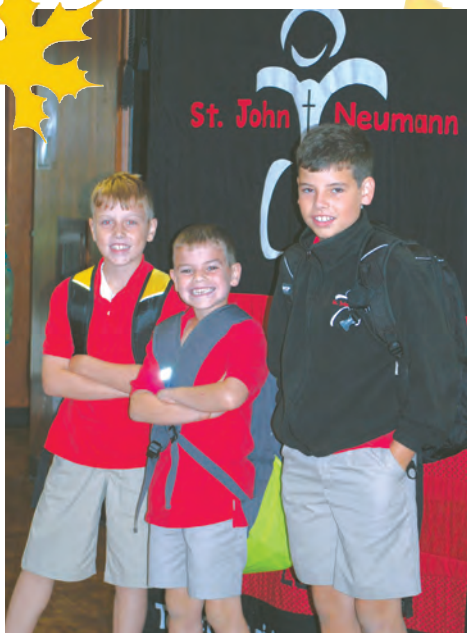


ST. MARY, CANANDAIGUA,
8th-grade ring ceremony



ST. JOSEPH, PENFIELD

ST. PATRICK, OWEGO



ST. JOHN NEUMANN, ROCHESTER



ST. MARY OUR MOTHER, HORSEHEADS,
students spread two tractor trailer loads of playground
ground cover in record time.



ST. LAWRENCE, GREECE



HOLY CROSS, ROCHESTER



ST. JOSEPH, AUBURN, *a bus safety drill*



ST. RITA, WEBSTER



ST. PIUS TENTH, ROCHESTER, *a teddy-bear picnic*



ST. MICHAEL, PENN YAN, *morning prayers around the flag on Sept. 11*



ST. KATERI, ROCHESTER



FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT'S DESK

DEAR CATHOLIC SCHOOL FAMILIES,

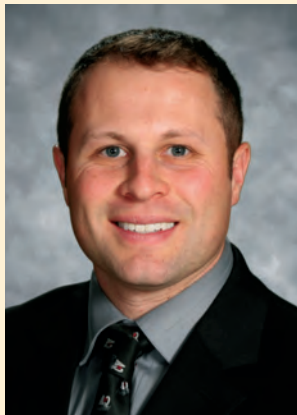
I have been blessed to open the school year this Fall 2013 as the Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Rochester.

It has been a pleasure to meet some of you in my travels to each of our schools and I look forward to many more opportunities to interact with our communities. As the Department of Catholic Schools strives to ensure a strong future for our schools in the Diocese of Rochester, I thank you for your positive witness to the accolades and potential of our unique school communities.

Catholic schools serve a vital part of the church's educational ministry and are essential in the development of our future community members and leaders. "The Catholic school forms part of the saving mission of the Church, especially for education in the faith" (The Catholic School, 1977). Our Catholic school teachers truly understand and assist our students in both spiritual and academic development.

I am grateful for all you do to help us fulfill the mission of our Catholic Schools. If the opportunity arises, please tell others of your experiences, for we believe that "word of mouth" is one of the best ways to promote our schools to prospective families. And, if you have a moment or two, please check out our newly designed Catholic Schools website at www.dorschools.org. I think you will enjoy it and find it a great resource.

May God Bless your school year.
Anthony S. Cook III
Superintendent



DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER
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ROCHESTER, NY 14624

QUESTIONS?

CONTACT THE OFFICE OF
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS:
by calling 585.328.3210
or emailing schools@dor.org

OR VISIT OUR WEB SITE
www.dorschools.org

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to all the Sponsors and
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GOLF
CLASSIC



Continued from page 1

- threats or being forced to do things
- racial bullying
- sexual bullying
- cyber-bullying (via mobile phone or the Internet)

Neither conflict resolution nor peer mediation strategies are appropriate responses to bullying, Olweus says, because "peer mediation/conflict resolution programs assume there is a bit of both right and wrong on both sides. Such programs may place some blame on the student who is being bullied and free the student or students who are bullying from some responsibility."

Furthermore, Olweus says, "in peer mediation/conflict resolution programs, the mediator is told not to take a moral stand on the issue at hand. In the case of bullying, it is very important that the adults take a moral stand and clearly communicate that bullying is not acceptable."

How prevalent is bullying in school? Olweus refers to a 2001 national study that found that

in grades 6 to 10, 17 percent of students said they had been bullied at least "sometimes," while 19 percent said they had bullied another student on occasion.

The strength of the program, Cook says, is that it engages the entire school community, not just a student demonstrating bullying behavior and a victim. "It uses student perception data," he says. In other words, the students identify times and places bullying behavior might occur. And school administrators increase supervision accordingly.

At St. Joseph's School in Penfield, says principal Theresa Hanna, "we have identified 'hot spots' where bullying behavior might occur. We want to be sure there is supervision in those places." The "hot spots" include restrooms, hallways between classes, and the playground, Hanna says.

Cyber-bullying on the rise

Another important reason for the increased concern about school bullying, Oberst says, is the dramatic rise of cyber-bullying, in both text messages and social media use. "In the old

days," he says, "when kids were teased, they went home and it ended. Now it's a constant."

Even some children in elementary grades carry smart phones, Oberst says, and almost all high school students have them in their pockets. Often, there is no escape.

"As a Catholic school, we can bring our faith elements to the discussion," Oberst says. "We can refer to the Gospel message" to love one another. Treating each other with dignity and respect isn't just a rule, it's what the Catholic faith asks of each of us, Oberst says.

The Olweus program has been evaluated on several occasions. In assessments involving more than 40,000 students, the program was linked to a 50 percent drop in the number of students who say they have been bullied or bullied others. The program has also been credited with a drop in vandalism, fighting, theft and truancy, and with clear improvements in the school environment.

Freelance writer Mark Hare is a retired local columnist for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle newspaper.