



Reading Eagle: Tim Leedy

Merrill McCubbin, left, of Merman Productions of Norfolk, Va., leads Greenwich-Lenhartsville Elementary School students Tuesday in a bullying prevention skit. The students are, from left, third-grader Russell Grate, 8, and fifth-graders Fallon Kolb and Alexander Reichl, both 10.

Kids can be kids, but not bullies, schools decide

Most districts in Berks County have programs to create a safe atmosphere for learning.

By Merav Bushlin

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Berks County educators aren't shrugging off bullying in schools as kids being kids.

"We'll wipe it out," said Celeste Brown, principal of Greenwich-Lenhartsville and Albany elementary schools in the Kutztown School District. "We're empowering the kids so no one feels like a victim anymore."

Three Kutztown schools, Greenwich-Lenhartsville and Albany elementary schools and Kutztown Middle School, kicked off bullying prevention programs this week.

They're not alone. Dr. Grace L. Cisek, a former program administrator at the Berks County Intermediate Unit, said 15 of 18 districts in Berks have started programs.

The programs are evidence that bullying is no longer overlooked as a natural part of childhood, said Brown, who added that many experts today consider bullying a social problem.

Cisek said that to create a safe atmosphere for learning, schools must implement an organized, scientific anti-bullying program.

The point is for schools to deal proactively with bullying, Cisek said.

Most people have a limited concept of what makes a bully, according to Merrill McCubbin, who led an anti-bullying assembly Tuesday morning at Greenwich-Lenhartsville.

"All of us are guilty at one time or another of being a bully," McCubbin told the students and parents.

When people think of a bully, they picture that big kid who picks fights during recess, but acts of bullying include name calling, teasing, or even cutting into the front of a line, McCubbin said.

According to Cisek, a negative action also must be repeated for it to qualify as bullying.

Patricia D. Werley, whose son Christopher is a third-grader, said she did not realize bullying can go beyond pushing and shoving until she recently read a pamphlet sent home by the school.

One of Christopher's classmates bullied him by excluding him from playground games and kicking him in the back, Werley said.

By telling his mother what happened and not pushing back, Christopher took the right steps, according to McCubbin's presentation.

Once a bully is identified, a school can intervene to stop the behavior and help a bully understand the effect of his actions, said Stephanie Steigerwalt, guidance counselor for the Albany and Greenwich-Lenhartsville schools.

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