

The Bradenton Times

Embracing Our Differences to Host Three-Day June Workshop on Bullying Prevention in Schools

Staff Report•

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SARASOTA - Embracing Our Differences has partnered with the curriculum and instruction department of the Sarasota County school district and Facing History and Ourselves to present "Embrace Courage: Bullying Prevention in Schools," a three-day workshop designed to give area educators the skills and tools they need to take a stand against bullying on and off campus.



The workshop is June 8-10, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., at the Suncoast Technical College, 4748 S Beneva Road in Sarasota. The institute is funded, in part, by grants from the Kates Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation and The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee. (A schedule of events is attached. If you would like to attend or send a media representative, please contact Sarah Wertheimer at 941-374-0427 or sarah@embracingourdifferences.org.)

"No community is immune to the devastating effects of bullying, including cyber bullying. Surveys of Sarasota and Manatee county students show that nearly 40 percent of them fear bullying and that nearly 11 percent have skipped school to avoid it," says Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences. "This initiative, now in its second year, is designed to provide educators and school officials with the support they need when they encounter such incidents. It will also give them the resources necessary to create a safe environment in which students can develop a healthy respect for diversity and inclusion."

According to Dr. Bernadette Bennett, program specialist for K-12 social studies for the Sarasota County school district, and chair of Embracing Our Differences' Education Committee, the 2016 Summer Diversity Institute's agenda is based on feedback from the inaugural 2015 summer session and the early 2016 abbreviated session designed for guidance counselors.

"Many participants at the inaugural 2015 summer workshop were the only staff member from their school," she explains. "Based on their feedback—that more participants per school would be valuable to the program—Embracing Our Differences presented a workshop for guidance counselors, social workers and school psychologists in January, 2016." Bennett explains that the EOD team then analyzed surveys and feedback from that session to develop the 2016 workshop. "It takes a cohesive team of guidance counselors, teachers and administrators to provide the support network schools need to implement programs. This is the reason we opened the summer session to include teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, support staff and administration."

Bennett explains that 48 participants from 11 schools in Sarasota and Manatee counties, are registered for the workshop. Over the course of the workshop, participants representing grades K –12 will receive resources and access to experts who will help them develop a plan for bullying intervention in their schools. These plans include strategies for addressing bullying situations, activities to prevent bullying issues, and resources that are aligned to the reading and writing Florida Standards, used in a variety of courses including reading, ELA, and social studies.

Bennett adds that participants will have training from Dr. Mary Johnson of Facing History and Ourselves, to identify the roles of the victim, bystander, perpetrator and up-stander, as well as guidance in the development of the school action plans.

"Cyber bullying will be addressed by individuals from law enforcement and professionals from the legal community will explain the implications of the law and possible liability," says Bennett. "We'll also feature an interactive panel discussion with local child psychiatrist, Christina M. de Guia, MD, ALSO Youth program coordinator, Molly Swift, and the head of guidance for Sarasota County schools, Peni Riedinger."

The 11 schools participating in this year's workshops are: Atwater Elementary, Fruitville Elementary, Gulf Gate Elementary, Heron Creek Middle School, Lamarque Elementary, Oak Park School, Philippi Shores Elementary, Pine View School, Sarasota Middle School, Sarasota School of Arts and Sciences and Toledo Blade Elementary.

Bottom line?

"We're offering area educators access to the resources that are necessary to create a safe environment for their students," says Bennett. "We understand that things don't change overnight; we're not going to end bullying, but we are going to do our part to heighten awareness about it."

Since 2004, downtown Sarasota's Island Park has been the backdrop for Embracing Our Differences' colorful, larger-than-life canvases integrating powerful imagery and thought-provoking messages celebrating diversity. The scale and impact of this outdoor exhibition has continued to grow, attracting more than 2.3 million visitors since its inception. The 2017 exhibit is set for April 1 to May 31 in Sarasota's Island Park. For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.

About Embracing Our Differences

Embracing Our Differences is a local non-profit that began in 2004. The organization showcases a community-based outdoor exhibit promoting positive, inspirational artistic and verbal expressions of inclusion, acceptance and respect. The mission of Embracing Our Differences is to use the transformational power of the arts to educate and inspire to create a better world. For more information, visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.