

Nonprofit helps Manatee, Sarasota teachers deal with bullying

BY MEGHIN DELANEY

mdelaney@bradenton.com June 5, 2015



Anastasia DiLego takes notes as educators and social workers attend a three-day conference held at USF Sarasota/Manatee by "Embracing our Differences" in order to address bullying and other issues. TIFFANY TOMPKINS-CONDIE/Bradenton Herald
TTOMPKINS@BRADENTON.COM |

MANATEE -- The days of bullying being contained to hallways and the cafeteria are long gone.

Cyberbullying -- aka online bullying -- has become a serious issue in schools across the nation, including in Manatee and Sarasota counties.

"Bullying has always been an issue, but it's gotten even worse," said Sarah Wertheimer, the associate executive director at Embracing Our Differences, the nonprofit that ran the event.

Cyberbullying was just one area covered in the first "Embrace Courage: Bully Prevention in Schools" conference run by the local nonprofit and the Curriculum and Instruction Department of the Sarasota County school district. The three-day conference at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee brought in more than 64 educators.

"We wanted to give teachers the resources and tools to handle it," Wertheimer said.

Over the course of the workshop, teachers and counselors, representing grades K-12, will create lesson plans to provide support to both students and faculty if they see bullying. Community partners, including district representatives, law enforcement officers and counselors, were on hand with information regarding local resources.

The Manatee County School district is updating its bullying policy. The school board is set to approve holding a public hearing Tuesday on the proposed changes, which includes adding a definition of cyber stalking.

The existing policy already included a definition for cyberbullying.

During the training, facilitators from the Anti-Defamation League in Florida worked with teachers to help them recognize and handle cyberbullying.

"If you remove the word cyber, it's the same for bullying," facilitator Deri Ronis said.

Marcie Shaughnessy, another facilitator, said teachers can't rely on filters and blocks to prevent students from accessing online and social media sites while they're in class.

"We know how creative our students can be," she said.

Shaughnessy and Ronis told teachers to make sure they follow proper steps for reporting signs of bullying and to use the skills they already have to be on the lookout.

"Go with your gut," Shaughnessy said.

Meghin Delaney, education reporter, can be reached at 941-745-7081. Follow her on Twitter @MeghinDelaney.

Read more here: http://www.bradenton.com/2015/06/05/5834103_nonprofit-helps-manatee-sarasota.html?rh=1#storylink=cpy