



Herald-Tribune media group

Sarasota schools' workshop to focus on bullying

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SARASOTA COUNTY - SARASOTA COUNTY -- During the 2013-2014 school year, bullying prompted 13 percent of Sarasota County middle school students to skip school during the previous 30 days and 10 percent of high school students to stay home, according to a survey.

Some 20 percent of Sarasota middle schoolers and 15 percent of high schools reported being subjected to verbal bullying that same year, according to the nonprofit Embracing Our Differences.

A new workshop hopes to lessen that number by providing teachers with resources and training to deal with the problem.

The three-day anti-bullying workshop will last from Wednesday through Friday and is sponsored by the Sarasota County School District, Embracing our Differences, the Anti-Defamation League and the Massachusetts-based Facing History and Ourselves. The Kates Foundation and Gulf Coast Community Foundation provided funding.

“We’ve been focusing on bullying for the last several years. This just evolved out of that,” said Bernadette Bennett, program specialist for social studies for K-12 schools in Sarasota County. “We may not be able to end bullying overnight, but we can look at what we can do stop it and provide resources for teachers.”

At least 43 teachers are expected to attend the workshop.

Bullying today is often different from what students experienced before the dawn of the Internet and social media. Now, bullying is not just restricted to the cafeteria and hallways, said Michael Shelton, the executive director of Embracing Our Differences.

It is everywhere a student has access to the Internet.

“There are certainly a whole lot more ways to go about it (bullying) now because of the Internet and social media,” said Shelton, whose group stages an annual diversity-oriented art exhibit at Island Park in Sarasota and Riverwalk in Bradenton. “It can go from creating an unpleasant situation to kids actually killing themselves over it.”

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