

## South Shore schools step up anti-bullying education

By Kaitlin Keane

GateHouse News Service

Posted Jan 16, 2011 @ 06:00 AM

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Two men fumble around on stage, acting out familiar schoolyard scenes. As they pretended to be children, one man shoved the other to the ground. He taunted the other man and told him he wasn't cool enough to attend his party.

The antics drew scattered giggles from the audience of 6- to 9-year-old students at Scituate's Wampatuck Elementary School.

But there were also whispers of admonishment from some kids to their peers: "It's not funny."

Assembly programs like the one staged in Scituate by the Power of One, a company that presents anti-bullying skits at schools across the country, are hardly new.

But they have taken on greater importance in a state where schools are now required to have anti-bullying plans – ones that include bullying prevention programs.

The law was approved in May after the suicides of two Massachusetts teens who were victims of bullying.

School systems had until Dec. 31 to file plans with the state. All but three – none of them on the South Shore – complied with the deadline.

School officials locally say they have had anti-bullying policies and programs in place long before the requirement from the state.

"We've gotten much more defined about what bullying is and about what behaviors we expect and will accept," said Linda Whitney, principal of Wampatuck Elementary School.

Maura Tenaglia, Quincy's director of student support services, says the steps Quincy schools have taken for years have been streamlined because of the law.

Quincy schools work with police and parents to curb bullying, and "now we are all kind of talking the same language," Tenaglia said. "There's a clear understanding of how we need to intervene and when we need to intervene."

In Marshfield, the school department's Safe Schools Initiative has long addressed bullying, Assistant Superintendent Scott Borstel said.

"What we did before is a lot of what the state has asked communities to do now," he said.

The Marshfield school system also has a group called Students Taking Action, which brings Marshfield High School students into elementary school classrooms to talk about bullying, Borstel said.

Schools have some flexibility when it comes to anti-bullying instruction.

This year, Norwell administrators adopted a curriculum called Great Body Shop. The series of social health and wellness lessons from the Children's Health Network addresses a wide range of issues and satisfies the state's requirements for anti-bullying education.

"It's not a bullying curriculum, it's a holistic health curriculum that has a strong bullying component for each grade," said Jamie Labillois, director of curriculum in Norwell. "In order for it to be effective, we think it needs to be comprehensive. It needs to be part of a bigger idea."

Most anti-bullying education has a strong focus on empowering the bystander, said Elizabeth Englander, a bullying and violence expert who founded the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center.

"You can try to fix kids that are bullies, which is not within the purview of most schools, or you can try to fix kids so that no one will ever become a victim, which is not possible," Englander said. "Or you can generate a social value that this is a behavior that is undesirable and that people should resist and not support it."

The lesson of the day in Scituate was that encouraging a bully is just as bad as being a bully.

Students were invited on stage to play one of the roles – victim, bully or bystander.

"Each and every one of you have the power to stop bullying when you see it," actor Alex Brokstein said. "When you use the power of one, all the roles disappear."

### Anti-bullying plans must include:

- Procedures for investigating and reporting bullying
- Plans to protect pupils who report bullies
- A procedure for notifying parents of bullies and victims of bullies if an incident takes place
- Services for bullies and victims of bullies
- Annual staff training
- Age-appropriate anti-bullying education

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