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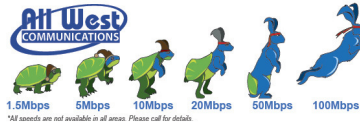
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News



Campaign Character Summit highlights culture of kindness

Posted: Thursday, Jun 16th, 2011
 BY: Isaiah May, Gazette Editor

After three days of break-out sessions, character study and keynote speakers, superintendent Teresa Chalk is thinking implementation.

“What I told the staff is the administration will talk and, when we get back to school, each building will be able to implement what character program they want,” Chalk said. “I want a K-12 theme to develop culture.”

Chalk joined teachers, staff and community members during the Campaign for Character Summit June 9-11 at the South Lincoln Training and Events Center.

Programs featured keynote speakers Dr. Vince Harris, Mike Gamache from Rachel’s Challenge, Dr. Gary M Smit and Dr. Mike Dreiblatt.

Each speaker brought a different point of view said Chalk, which gives those in attendance a better understanding of character and bullying.

“One reason we did it as a summit is to have a variety of presenters,” Chalk said, “and they all have a different theme towards a single problem.”

Crowds ranged from 40 to more than 70 in each session.

“We had hoped for a better turnout from the community,” she said.

Chalk said the one message she and fellow educators got from the summit



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is to create and use kindness in combating a bully.

“You can’t bully the bully out of the bully,” she said. “It’s the philosophy of the six pillars and a caring culture we need to embrace.”

She continued.

“Treat the bully kindly. It’s not just the consequences that matter, it’s the demeanor in which you give them those consequences.”

Chalk is unsure whether the funding will be available to host the summit next year but she plans on reinforcing what was learned.

“I’m really grateful to be able to put this on,” she said. “We will have some follow-up and we’ll have to choose which programs to bring back but we hope the community will be in support of instilling the character culture.”

Dr. Vince Harris

“Conflict Resolution and Bullying Prevention”

Dr. Vince Harris prefaced his next statement.

“Some of you aren’t going to like this. You’re not going to agree with what I’m about to say,” he said to the nearly 60 Lincoln County School District No. 1 educators, staff and community members. “There are no such thing as bullies.”

Harris, who has spoken on the topic of conflict resolution to educators, businesses and politicians, said bullies aren’t really bullies.

“They just engage in those actions,” he said. “They are, except when they aren’t.”

He went on to say that the actions that are defined as bullying vary from person to person.

“Bullying is a loaded word,” Harris said. “When you hear the word bullying, there will be a different set of images, movies you will see.”

Harris said that not everything that is classified as or called bullying is bullying. Using the example of middle-school-aged boys hitting each other, Harris described that as a situation of acceptance.

“It includes everyone,” he said. “It says we are friends. ‘I can hit you, you can hit me, it’s OK.’ Someone may even feel left out and think ‘Why aren’t they hitting me?’”

Each situation is different and Harris encouraged the group to generalize for the sake of understanding.

“I’m just looking at one structured way to think about it,” he said, “an agreeable lie.”

For Harris, three behaviors indicate generalized bullying: it’s harmful, it’s progressive and it makes a person or group of people feel uncomfortable and that their safety is in jeopardy. These must be happening at the same time.

He also broke bullying behaviors into two groups, interpretational and relational.

Interpretational bullying is an insult or sarcastic comment used to hurt. Relational bullying, as defined by Harris, is excluding someone from dodge ball, or abusing a relationship.

Harris highlights a structure of basic human needs that everyone has the desire to fulfill. Those are confidence/certainty, variety/uncertainty, love and connection, significance/importance/identity, growth and contribution.

“Bullying or violence fills those first four, instantly,” Harris said. “The drive is only to meet them. It’s irrelevant how they do that.”



He continued, saying that how they meet those can be habit forming.

“Meeting three or more at one time, at an 8-10 level, will have an addicting quality,” Harris said.

Once that is understood, Harris said, then educators gain a leverage for change.

“We can ask where they can find a way to change where they meet them,” he said of the first four needs.

As Harris concluded he again warned the audience that they may not like what he is going to say.

“Bullying isn’t going away. Violence isn’t going away,” he said.

Harris admits you will fail at attempting to change these behaviors.

“It’s not a one-size-fits-all idea,” he said. “You will fail, but when you succeed it makes all the failing worth it.”

Dave Gamache

“Rachel’s Challenge”

As Dave Gamache gathered the more than 60 in attendance Thursday night after dinner, he couldn’t promise they wouldn’t tear up in the second half of his program.

“I see a few, or a lot of you have cried already,” he said. “I can’t say you won’t stop crying, it’s just how powerful this stuff is.”

Gamache told the story of Rachel Scott, who was the first victim of the Columbine shooting in 1999. Her family took action and created Rachel’s Challenge, a national program that hopes to combat school violence with an atmosphere of kindness.

As Gamache has told many student’s “Rachel’s gone, but her family honors her.”

Rachel’s Challenge focuses on five programs. Those include a new student program, target letters, a world record food drive and the chain reaction program.

The fifth program focused on by Gamache was the A-OK, or atmosphere of kindness.

“School spirit goes up and bullying goes down,” Gamache said, “if the focus is on actions of kindness.”

This atmosphere, Gamache said, includes constant reminders that this school doesn’t tolerate bullying.

“We hang a banner in the main area of the school,” Gamache said, “and the kids have signed it, promising to try better.”

He said that their promise centers around the idea of fighting F.O.R the bullying not against them.

“We don’t want to get rid of the bullies,” he said, “we want to show them a better way.”

F.O.R is an acronym for Friends of Rachel, which are groups of students that form following Rachel Challenge presentations. These groups, according to Gamache, help encourage and participate in the five programs.

“It doesn’t take a large group of people to get change down,” he said. “One person can change your day and we believe we change the world one person at a time.”

Gamache hopes the community participates and told the educators in attendance that it doesn’t take much to get involved.

“We just want your L.I.F.E,” he said. “Your labor, influence, finances or expertise.”

He continued.

“It takes work. This isn’t ‘sit back and watch Rachel,’” he said, “this is Rachel’s Challenge.”

The organization has presented in 49 states and averages 3.4 schools a day.

And though the Rachel's Challenge works to provide services and curriculum to schools, Gamache said they have a different attitude.

"This isn't a company. It's a movement."

Dr. Gary M. Smit

"Character in Our Community"

When it comes right down to it, Dr. Gary M. Smit doesn't know it all about Character Counts.

And he'd be the first to admit it.

"I don't have it all figured out," he told a group of educators, parents and community members Friday night. "And I don't think the kids have it either. We have to continually work on it."

The work Smit hopes to continue is the use of the Character Counts! pillars in schools and at home.

"It's not a program. It's a way of life, to instill those core values in kids," he said.

Smit approaches Character Counts! with a T.E.A.M (teach, enforce, advocate, model) process.

"Look for those moments. "Is it in TV? Is it in movies?" he said of the teaching approach. "We can't miss those direct teaching opportunities."

Though Smit says character is needed in every school, it's parents who help create the culture at school.

"Character is first and foremost taught at home," he said. "But even the best parent needs help."

Smit calls this a "culture of kindness."

"In these, respect is evident, people collectively intervene," Smit said. "They say, 'I can show I care.'"

Several organizations contribute to the culture said Smit. They include faith communities, schools, youth groups and work places.

A good program, Smit said, takes it home.

"Character programs get parents involved, or there won't be change," he said. "Parents' worst mistake is to under estimate their influence."

Smit includes character among the three mandates for schools. The other two are safety and academic achievement.

"You can't separate these out in your school. You have to have all three," he said.

These align with what Smit believes are the two most common goals in education, to make kids smart and make them good people.

When working with the Character Counts! pillars, Smit says those teaching it need to be consistent and concrete.

"Children will judge your values not by what you say, but by what you do, and what you permit them to do," he explained in a handout. "They will judge you not by your best moments but your last worst act."

Smit left the audience saying that teaching positive character traits isn't only about their years in school, but beyond that.

"Do you think trustworthiness will go out of style?" he asked the audience. "I can guarantee these will be needed."

Dr. Mike Dreiblatt

“How to stop bullying, cyber bullying and social aggression”

Bullying is the abuse of the difference in power.

Though the laws vary from state to state, most people can understand Dr. Mike Dreiblatt’s definition of bullying.

“Parents can’t quite understand the law,” he said, “but they can get the abuse of power.”

Dreiblatt, who spoke Saturday to a group of educators, parents and community members, separated bullying into four types; physical, verbal, cyber and relational/social aggression.

Though Dreiblatt said physical bullying is the most obvious, it is not the most prevalent. That is relation/social aggression bullying.

“It’s ‘do this or I won’t be your friend,’” he said. “It’s gossiping, rumor starting. It’s where the weapon of choice is the relationship itself.”

Most bystanders, according to Dreiblatt, do nothing. He believes this is because of several reasons, including the fear of getting involved, the target of the bullying should stand up for themselves or they do not know what to do.

“The reason why children don’t get involved is because they don’t see teachers get involved,” he said.

Dreiblatt focused on knowing what to do and doing it quickly.

He outlined a four-step process for quick staff intervention.

“This is quick. This is dirty. Thirty seconds at most,” he said.

The first step is to stop the behavior.

This includes interrupting the behavior and making sure all the students in the area hear your comments.

“They have to learn they can’t behave that way here,” Dreiblatt said.

The second step is identifying the behavior with a simple description, such as “That is name calling.”

“Most of us are good at the first two,” Dreiblatt said of the process, “but that’s not enough.”

The third step is to remind students of the school’s expectations. The last step is reminding students of their behavior expectations.

“This is something like ‘Treat others the way they want to be treated,’” Dreiblatt said. “Note that it’s not the Golden Rule but rather treating them the way they wish to be treated.”

Dreiblatt said, although the four steps are a good tool to stop bullying, there’s more.

“It’s not enough to go through the four steps,” he said. “It’s how.”

Assertiveness, according to Dreiblatt, is an effective, professional, and respectful technique that includes a calm demeanor, a specific body language and a neutral tone of voice.

Dreiblatt also said eye contact is important.

“Looking at them is not assuming they’re looking at you,” he said.

He said the choice of words matter as well.

“Less is more. Shorter is better,” he said. “Say what you mean. Mean what you say and stop.”

Dreiblatt said that bullying lasts through childhood.

“They don’t go away,” he said. “They just change their environment.”

And prevention, Dreiblatt said, is up to the communities putting up a unified front.

“Look at the community, the conversations we’re having,” he said. “It shows what we’re doing to make this school better.”

For the complete article see the 06-16-2011 issue.

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