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Youth Empowerment Conference

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Through the Learn To Be...Tobacco Free School Health Education Initiative, SAS sponsored two youth empowerment conferences on the subject of Bullying, Hazing and Sexual Harassment.

In March 2004, Eastern Suffolk BOCES [Student Assistance Service](#) sponsored a conference for school personnel on the subject of Bullying, Hazing and Sexual Harassment. At the time it was the hope of the conference planners to create a similar conference for secondary level students to equip them with information and skills that can make a difference in these areas.



Cindy Pierce Lee from SCOPE, Tom Berger SAS Violence Prev. Specialist, and Debbie Young-Szala, SAS conference organizers.

Through the Learn To Be...Tobacco Free School Health Education Initiative, SAS sponsored two youth empowerment conferences on this theme. The first, held on December 17, 2004 was for students in ninth through twelfth grades. Approximately 154 students from the following 12 districts and 1 BOCES site attended: Longwood, Sachus, Northport, Rocky Point, Shoreham-Wading River, Sayville, Hampton Bays, Bayport-Blue Point, Bay Shore, Center Moriches, Bridgehampton, Greenport and the [Islip Academic Center](#).

Our Middle School Conference held one month later on January 19, 2005 included 135 students from the following 12 districts and one BOCES site: William Floyd, Sayville, Miller Place, Mattituck-Cutchogue, Middle Country, Riverhead, Northport, Southampton, Hampton Bays, Longwood, Eastport/South Manor and the [Brookhaven Academic Center](#).



The students are doing icebreaker exercises and introducing themselves to each other. Then they went to their first workshop.

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Each conference began with a keynote address. For the high school attendees, Michael Dreiblatt defined each of these behaviors and emphasized the power of the bystander in intercepting bullying. Students and advisors then attended three of eight workshops, including several led by students from Northport, Sachem and Westhampton Beach.



Keynote Speaker Michael Dreiblatt (left) and his partner from Balance Educational Services in Vermont, Steve Breakstone.

We followed a similar format for the Middle School conference with the exception that the keynote was delivered by the Northport students. They performed a skit they had written themselves on the consequences of bullying, much of which was derived from their very own experiences. The middle school students in the audience were riveted and asked powerful questions of the high school performers after the presentation.

Following a lunchtime activity, both conferences ended with students reporting the outcome of their lunchtime discussions to the whole audience. High School students were asked to come up with a list of "Likes and Yikes": qualities in relationships that were essential and those that were intolerable. Mr. Dreiblatt was able to pull the answers together to show our commonalities and helped youth to see that they had the power to make healthy choices for themselves in all relationship contexts.



Students back in their school group at lunch working on tasks that they were given to complete and report on to the whole conference group at closing of conference.



Northport HS Players who did an excellent workshop on bullying and social aggression.

Middle School students were asked to identify something they learned from the day and something they could do in their schools to improve the climate. Some plans they identified include:

- "Create our own skits, similar to the Northport Players."
- "Share the information we learned with other students in our school."
- "Take responsibility for your own actions."
- "Work as a team."
- "Don't judge people or spread rumors."
- "Be sensitive and use language carefully."
- "Ask teachers to be more aware and not ignore bullying behaviors."
- "Ask our school to have more adults present in the cafeterias and gymnasiums where much of these behaviors take place."

Feedback based on advisor and student evaluations for both conferences was very positive. Unfortunately we had to turn down approximately 11 high schools and 6 middle schools because the response was so high. We are considering hosting another high school conference in the spring.

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