



Agencies team up to prevent school bullying

By Brock Letchworth
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A couple of Pitt County agencies have collaborated this month in an attempt to prevent bullying in schools.

The Mediation Center of Eastern Carolina and Pitt/Greenville Project Safe Neighborhoods for the fourth consecutive year are visiting some of the county's schools to discuss bullying, its effects and the potential consequences for bullies.

Maggie Crandall, schools program coordinator with the Mediation Center, said the anti-bullying initiative is held in honor of National Crime Prevention Month. She said 17 of Pitt County's 36 schools are participating in some way.

"Bullying is a growing problem, and it is a serious issue," Crandall said. "We want to teach children about bullying through demonstrations and interactive presentations. We haven't really seen any major bullying cases here in Pitt County, and we are trying to keep it that way."

Crandall and Desha Lane, coordinator of Project Safe Neighborhoods, said several bullying cases in recent years that garnered media attention nationwide brought to light the importance of getting the message out.

On Wednesday, the duo relayed that message to students at Belvoir Elementary School.

As with their other elementary stops, Crandall and Lane spent most of their time with the K-5 students explaining the basics of bullying and why it is hurtful.

"We try to catch them early," Lane said. "For the younger kids, we want to put a label on bullying. We want to let them know what it is and why it is wrong."

At the middle school level, Crandall and Lane say they have decided this year to focus more on cyber-bullying and the ways to prevent it. The rising popularity of social networking and cell phone activity have opened up avenues for new ways of bullying, they say.

"We were hearing a lot more about cyber-bullying cases around the country so we knew we needed to start addressing it," Crandall said. "We give the students information about how they can prevent being cyber-bullied and we make sure they understand the consequences of being a cyber bully."

Crandall says laws pertaining to cyber-bullying such as the one recently passed in North Carolina are helping their cause.

"Students realize this is not just something that is harmful for the person being bullied, it is illegal," Crandall said.

Anti-bullying events will continue at schools throughout the month.

Schools also are participating by holding bulletin board/door decorating contests, school assemblies, grade level presentations and essay contests.

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