

NEWS RELEASE

Page 1 of 2

Tuesday, May 31, 2005

Subject: *Creating Peaceful Schools*

From: Brian Perkin – Communications Officer
(613) 258-7757 or 1-800-443-4562 (ext. 206)

CATHOLIC DISTRICT
SCHOOL BOARD OF
EASTERN ONTARIO



Box 2222, 2755 Hwy. 43
Kemptville, Ontario K0G 1J0

Carleton Place & Almonte Catholic School Administrators Work to Reduce Bullying and Create Peaceful Schools

Working To Reduce Aggression

Carleton Place and Almonte school administrators with the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario are focusing on one of the most under-rated and enduring problems for young people – verbal and physical aggression by bullies. In a presentation entitled '*Creating A Peaceful School*', a number of CDSBEO principals and vice-principals in Carleton Place and Almonte addressed the Board's Catholic Partners Meeting earlier this month to explore the causes of bullying and prevention strategies aimed at reducing or eliminating this behaviour. The session was presented by Holy Name of Mary Principal *Francesca Hernandez* of Almonte, along with St. Mary Principal *Jennifer Perkin*, St. Gregory Principal *David McGahey* and Notre Dame CHS Vice-Principal *Caroline LeBelle* of Carleton Place.

Bullying Knows No Bounds

Mrs. Hernandez says bullying knows no cultural, financial or social bounds. In boys, it can manifest itself in physical altercations or extortion, while girls may use social alienation, gossiping, exclusion or more subtle tactics that are harder to detect.

Mrs. Hernandez, Principal of Holy Name of Mary School in Almonte, states, "In many instances, the bullying child uses verbal or physical aggression to deal with conflict at home and elsewhere. Their friends seem to endorse violence or may be bullies themselves. The victim can be an innocent bystander or a child who may be physically different, sensitive or socially awkward, and these victims usually resist 'tattling' because of social retaliation. Over time, those exhibiting bullying behaviour can experience moral disengagement, adult criminality or harassment."

Asserting Message, '*It's Not OK*'

Successful prevention programs focus on the behaviour itself and not the child. Mrs. Perkin, Principal of St. Mary's School in Carleton Place, explains, "It is important to establish clearly defined rules and consequences for bullies. We have to assert the message that aggression is '*Not OK*'. This approach has to be consistently enforced at school and reinforced in the home and community. It's not just about a child saying, 'I'm not going to be a bully.' It's that *nobody* is going to be allowed to be a bully." Mrs. Perkin points out that the Catholic Graduate Expectations lay the foundation for a positive, proactive and redemptive approach to bullying in our Catholic schools. The rights of the victim and the responsibilities of the bully and the bystander must be reflected in light of gospel values.

...Page 2

Teacher's Tragedy Spawns Peaceful Schools International

Mr. McGahey, Principal of St. Gregory School in Carleton Place, highlighted the work of Nova Scotia educator *Hetty van Gulp*, who lost her eldest son in a bullying incident at school. Hetty turned her personal tragedy into a life of greater purpose by establishing '*Peaceful Schools International*', an organization that advocates safe and harmonious school environments. The organization promotes practical ways of achieving peaceful schools - many already in place at St. Gregory School.

Creating peaceful schools, explains Mr. McGahey, is about building an atmosphere of cooperation and respect. "What we are looking for," states Mr. McGahey, "is a 'tipping point' in our schools where we all feel safe. It's like learning mathematics. All of a sudden you reach the tipping point where students truly grasp the concept. In dealing with bullying, the tipping point is when children say, 'We don't do that here'."

Helping Bullies and Their Victims

Many schools work to reduce bullying by creating year-long themes of 'Peace' and 'Respect' with assemblies and projects to help children learn about conflict and intervention. Mrs. LaBelle, Vice-Principal of Notre Dame CHS in Carleton Place, points out that it is important to have a common goal with a well-defined vision statement that students and the entire school community can support. Prevention programs are developed to help bullies by engaging them in leadership activities, increasing their social skills and helping them get in touch with their emotions. Victims are encouraged to communicate and discuss their feelings on bullying and to respond with assertive, not aggressive behaviour.

Values Guided by the Gospel

Director of Education *Ann Perron* says many school boards are talking about the importance of character education these days. Ms. Perron points out, "Catholic education has always been about character education. As a Christian people, we are guided by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the values that he gave witness to through his life. They are values such as peace, justice, human dignity, love and forgiveness. They guide us in our work with our students as they continue to respond to the call to transform the world in the image of Christ so that it might be a world of justice and peace."

*(For more information, contact Brian Perkin, CDSBEO Communications
at (613) 258-7757 or 1-800-443-4562 ext. 206)*