

October 21, 2012

Diana Mills - Correspondent for the Daily Herald



With cyberspace now offering a new medium to torment people, there has been an explosion of bullying events in the news, some even contributing to deadly ends.

Timberline Middle School in Alpine – with 1,277 students – has taken steps to discover instances of bullying occurring on school property and educating students on how to combat and end it.

School counselor Dianne Brown has been a part of the bullying awareness process at the school from the beginning. She along with counselors Colleen Roundy and Shaun Noyce, work one-on-one with every student registered at Timberline.

Brown noted that in 2009 the school sent surveys to the home of every student and was surprised at the feedback.

“We received responses from about 14 students and that many parents voicing concern over the problem of bullying.” She said.

Principal Terry Hill said he realized it was time to address the issue as a new school and began working with teachers, staff, PTSA officers and student leaders to set up a plan to recognize and control bullying.

The adult and student group previewed a video on how to protect themselves from cyber bullying, then showed it to the student body. A week of information and activities for the teenagers was followed up with once-a-month presentations on the subject to keep the students aware of the matter.

The week of promotion was called PROS Week – Protecting the Rights Of Students. The event encouraged students to be “Positive, Respectful, Open-minded, Solvers (Problem).”

“The school also presented ‘Bully Cards’ to all of the new students and the seventh-graders,” Brown said. The handout is the size of a business card and lists suggestions for “What do I do?” (if being

bullied) on one side, and “What happens to a person bullying another?” on the reverse side. The size makes them easy to keep in a wallet or pocket.

This year the school invited author and motivational speaker Valerie Ackley to present an assembly titled “the Power of Thought” to the students. Her book, “What Are You Thinking?” and her presentation inspire children and teens to use their minds in learning to be heroes.

The school also continued last year’s program of presenting anti-bullying topics to every student during their Flex Time, which is a 30-minute period with smaller groups held Tuesday through Friday. The students discussed positive speech, respect, open-mindedness and tolerance, plus being problem-solvers in overcoming aggressive behavior.

The event included activities, recognition and competitions to involve the students in recognizing bullying happening around them.

In the plan to keep bullying instances down, the school now has Travis Atwood – a uniformed police officer – on duty at the school several hours a week.

“Officer Atwood met the students at the front doors and handed out candy at the beginning of the school year,” Brown said. “He cares about the students, and the students have responded well to him.”

“We’re emphasizing to students who observe bullying not to tolerate it,” Brown said.