

Schools should adopt anti-bullying policy

The fighting boys of Salem, Ill., have become the most recent example of violence and lack of character. People Magazine's April cover story regenerated the national angst over bullying. The article appeared three months after Phoebe Prince committed suicide in response to relentless taunts and cyber messages

GUEST COLUMNIST



By Diane Stirling

and days after six teens were indicted on charges that connect them to her death. Such events move people to action. The Massachusetts Legislature passed a law mandating anti-bullying curriculum in the state's public schools. The Missouri Legislature revised its education statutes in 2009, requiring every district to adopt an anti-bullying policy and provide training to its employees. Is this enough to change the character and culture of our future work force?

Educators are taking a proactive approach, asking for policies and collaborative efforts that address these critical issues. Locally, for more than 22 years, CHARACTERplus has been leading the way toward effective bully and violence prevention, providing professional development in five areas:

- Comprehensive bully prevention (No More Bullying) based on the well-researched Olweus model — Starting in 2003 CHARACTERplus has reached more than 500 educators with this preventive program:

- Bus Driver training program, WHEELS, that builds a culture of safety and belonging on the bus involving more than 200 administrators, bus transportation supervisors and drivers in six workshops held since 2007;
- Cyber bullying prevention conferences for and by secondary students that have involved 250 in the past three years;
- Certification of more than 600 educators in CPI Nonviolent Crisis Prevention & Intervention since 2006;
- Innovative curriculum integration techniques that build empathy and empowerment among bystanders.

The ability to prevent bullying and violence among youth is a key focus at the CHARACTERplus national conference to be held June 23-24 at the Hyatt Regency at the Arch. Among more than 10 sessions related to bully prevention are "Suicide Prevention and Depression Awareness Education," "Real Friends vs. the Other Kind (Peer Approval Addiction)," "Classroom Management and Eliminating Bullying," "Breaking the Code — Empowering Bystanders," "Students Creating a Safer School," and "Understanding and Addressing Cyber Bullying."

"The formal bully prevention training by CHARACTERplus has provided strategies that our administrators, teachers and counselors use to prevent bullying from occurring and to react with effective and appropriate steps in the unfortunate instances in which it does occur in order to correct the behavior and prevent recurrence," says Dr. Craig Larson, superintendent of the Rockwood School District.

The emphasis CHARACTERplus places on students' sense of belonging and empowerment have a significant effect on bullying. Strategies such as class meetings, buddies



(frequent, academically-based activities between pairs of students separated by at least two grade levels), principal's advisory councils comprised of students, and conflict resolution training for all students create a culture where peers do not allow bullying. When every elementary student through third grade has an older buddy who takes responsibility for them, they have an inherent protection system. When students learn to share their thoughts, knowledge and problem-solving skills in class meetings, they build positive peer pressure. Students experience empathy, find inner courage and use the skills they've learned from class meetings to express themselves honestly and effectively.

"In the years since Rockwood teachers

have facilitated effective class meetings, bullying in our schools has decreased noticeably," Larson observes. "The style of open communication empowers students to address concerns among students and to call the class's attention to actions of individuals that make the class as a whole uncomfortable.

"The discussions about how to be respectful of each other have had a profound impact on many students. And this impact at elementary grades continues into middle schools, where class meetings are also held regularly. The primary change in our middle schools comes from students treating each other with respect and expecting that of their classmates," Larson says.

Rockwood School District is one of 55 districts in the metro region who belong to CHARACTERplus, a division of Cooperating School Districts. Their member fees are matched by corporate and community donors and this unique partnership affords high quality professional development available to more than 27,000 educators, access to national experts in the field of character development, certification in character education, a Leadership Academy for principals that is becoming a model for the nation, and an active network of character education leaders who meet regularly.

It is important to instill these character development traits in students to insure an ethical work force of the future. Visit www.characterplus.org to see if your child's school is a member of CHARACTERplus and if not, how to become involved.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Voluntary taxes

Editor:

I want to introduce to the public a new concept for funding the federal government. A new efficient tax system that is completely voluntary. This tax plan has been introduced to the United States Congress as the FairTax Act (H.R. 25/S. 296).

Imagine keeping every dime of your paycheck. No federal income tax taken out, no Social Security or Medicare tax taken out, no taxes on business and no taxes on investment income. Imagine on top of getting your full paycheck you would get a monthly payment to cover taxes on all necessities up to the poverty level. All of this would be replaced with a consumption tax of 23 percent on new purchases only. No, the cost of everything you buy will not necessarily go up 23 percent under this plan. While the cost of new products would go up, many of the costs to produce products would be eliminated which would reduce retail prices. How could this be?

All taxes and tax compliance costs like tax preparation and accounting fees on production of a product are passed on through each process and then eventu-

ally passed on to you the consumer. These are called embedded costs. Economists estimate that there is roughly a 22 percent increase in the cost of merchandise due to embedded costs. Under the FairTax plan there would be no income tax and compliance costs passed on to the consumer.

Now imagine how businesses based overseas would react to a country that does not punish them for creating jobs. A country that says, "hey, if you come here and open a business we will not tax you." Business from all countries would flood into the U.S. to base their operations here. One would literally have to hide under a rock in order to avoid getting a job.

The underground economy will be taxed at last. Illegal businesses such as drug dealing, prostitution, as well as legitimate cash only businesses that are evading taxes will finally be contributing to the federal government when they make purchases.

See the tax code in black and white with this new inclusive tax. When you see a product at the store for \$100 it would be marked at \$100 and your re-

ceipt will read \$77 retailer, \$23 tax. No more accountants, special interests groups and politicians helping some become exempt from paying their fair share. Those who want to look wealthy will pay tax when they purchase luxury items. A consumption tax is a much less burdensome tax since it is paid by individuals both willing and able to pay them. It is not a penalty for productivity like the current income tax system.

The FairTax would change the way we fund Social Security and Medicare. Instead of taxing only 158 million workers, over 300 million citizens plus 50 million tourists who come from abroad will be funding our entitlement costs.

No more IRS. No more tax forms, no more tax filing. April 15th will be just an ordinary day. No fumbling around finding all your tax documents, then paying to have them prepared, and then hoping that everything is done right so as to avoid the dreaded audit.

The FairTax would encourage citizenship for illegal aliens since citizenship is required to qualify for the tax prebate included in this tax plan.

There truly is a better way to fund our federal government. It's time for a tax code that's fair, transparent and understandable. We need to end the increasingly complex tax code that is dividing our great nation and start a tax system that promotes innovation and inspires new hope for a more thriving and prosperous America for all. Let's eliminate the special interests groups in Washington and return the power of government back to its people. The FairTax is the economic shot in the arm needed to get this country moving again. It's time to eliminate the IRS and start the FairTax!

Please check out more at fairtax.org, or read *The FairTax Book* by Neal Boortz. If this sounds like a good idea to you tell your representatives that you want the FairTax.

Missouri has a version of the FairTax (HJR 56) that needs your support to be put on the ballot. What better place to start the blood flowing in the economy again than in the heart of America. Tell your Missouri senator that you want the FairTax.

KEN BECKER, St. Louis