Poolesville Cluster Schools Strive to End Bullying

By Heidi Rosvold-Brenholtz

It takes a village, as the saying goes, to create and sustain a supportive environment. The Poolesville Cluster schools put extra effort into their bullying prevention strategies November 8 to November 12 with the cluster-wide Blue Ribbon Week – We Have the Power to Get Along Initiative. While each individual school, Monocacy Elementary School (MES), Poolesville Elementary, and John Poole Middle School (JPMS), works throughout the year to make students aware of age-appropriate strategies for bullying prevention, conflict resolution, and friendship skills, this year marks the first cluster-wide coordination effort to identify and end bullying in our community. The schools marked the awareness campaign with theme days throughout the week.

According to Peg Arnold, seventh and eighth grade counselor and counseling department chairperson at JPMS, cluster school counselors met over the summer as part of the Poolesville Pride Initiative to examine how to collaborate on anti-bullying strategies. At JPMS, bullying prevention was a topic for more than five years as part of the National No Name Calling Week observed in October and served as a unique springboard for Blue Ribbon Week at the middle school. “It’s a good fit with our five core values of pride, integrity, respect, dedication, and effort, and a way for students to learn how to show respect throughout their lives,” said Ms. Arnold. Likewise, school counselor Janet Beaudoin of MES has been teaching bullying prevention strategies to students for many years.

An assembly featuring Olney, Maryland-based Project Change and its You Have The Power (YHTP!)—Bullying Prevention Peer Education Program marked the end of Blue Ribbon week November 12 at JPMS. Monocacy and Poolesville Elementary Schools also hosted the group. At JPMS, the assembly featured power-point and video presentations by Sherwood High School students Meghan Silliman and Jenn Morrison showing the damaging impact bullying can have on students’ lives and tips for ending a bully’s control.

It’s a story JPMS eighth-grader Corrine Wallace sadly knows all too well. As a guest speaker at the assembly, Corrine bravely shared her personal story of losing her nine-year-old cousin, Montana Lance, to suicide last January in Dallas, Texas. Montana was a target of bullies. From the looks on their faces, Corrine’s tearful account clearly had an effect on her classmates.

“The YHTP! assembly will help Monocacy students know how to speak up for themselves and others if there is a bullying situation and also that they should get an adult to help and support a classmate or themselves so that the power is taken away from the bully,” explained Ms. Beaudoin.

For more information about bullying prevention in your student’s school, contact the guidance office or ask your student. Information about the YHTP! program is also available at Project Change’s website: www.projectchange-md.org.