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Two approaches to student behavior present at the elementary level

By Amy Maginnis-Honey
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FAIRFIELD — Children at Nelda Mundy Elementary School recite a peace pledge each day in which they promise to use their words in a kind way and to respect each other and all people to create peace for one and all.

Each student is expected to be a kid for peace, said school principal Kristen Cherry.

"It focuses on the positive, not on 'you did this wrong,'" Cherry said of the pledge -- which comes from Kids for Peace, a California-based nonprofit started five years ago by two mothers.

Rather than an anti-bullying program, Cherry chose Kids for Peace, which also has a chapter at Rolling Hills Elementary School.

Kids for Peace also has an annual The Great Kindness Challenge.

Cherry said she thought her school could benefit from the challenge being done on a more frequent basis.

Now, each student has a list of challenges they can tackle and record on a monthly sheet. Suggestions range from hugging a sibling to cleaning up the trash around the school.

The sheets are then plastered on the school office windows, and some ideas are printed in the school's monthly newsletter.

As a result, Cherry said she's seen students have more respect for their fellow classmates.

The approach is different at David Weir Elementary School.

Students on Friday will see "The Power of One," an anti-bullying live performance that is a series of skits focusing on how every child has the power to report bullying when they see it.

"We have had some issues (with bullying)," Weir principal Martha Lacy said. "We see it even though we are an elementary school. We see it starting about fourth grade."

It's being combated by things like the performance and the twice-a-week visits from a marriage and family therapist.

The therapist meets with bullies and those being bullied.

"I can see a difference in the behavior of the kids he has been working with," Lacy said of the therapist.

Bullying on campus is more subtle. Fist fights break out when the students are on their way home, Lacy said. However, the school is responsible for the students until they arrive home.

"We have to follow through once the kids leave the school grounds," she said. "In their mind it's OK (to fight) because they are not here (on campus) anymore. But that's not the case since we are still responsible for them."

Lacy said she is excited about hosting "The Power of One."

"It gives tools to the teacher they can go back and use with the kids," she said. "That's the important piece."

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