



Caroline Chapman at The Ellison School incorporates the message into her literature class. Students from left: Alexandra Durham, Dhruv Patel, James Hammerstedt and Caleb Chapman.

Nationally, 20 percent of teens are bullied at school (2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey). At the state level, the "The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights" legislation was recently passed. Three local administrators weigh in on the issue, share their anti-bullying measures and the impact of the new legislation, and offer tips to students and parents.

Caroline Chapman, who is in her second year as head of The Ellison School, has more than 20 years experience with middle schoolers. It is an age when bullying tends to peak, Chapman has teaching experience in both public and private school, "Here there are...fewer kids to watch, so it is easier because of size. But kids can be *mean* anywhere."

Bullying is a hot topic among educators. Chapman says bullying came up in about 75 percent of her post-graduate courses. "It's something that is so prevalent. It is not just a problem faced by public schools."

Dr. Tom McCann, principal of Vineland High, says that bullying "is alive and well in the schools. There's a problem and we know there's a problem. One of the biggest things we do is communicate with the kids and have a culture that that stuff will not be tolerated," says McCann, in his 29th year as an educator.

At Petway Elementary Principal Jennifer Frederico says bullying looks a little different with the 560 younger students she oversees. "It's teasing, name-calling, and excluding," says Frederico, in her third year as principal at Petway. "In 4th and 5th grade, it's gossip."

Bullying used to be...more obvious," says McCann. "They would go up and push someone around. We could see it and always address it.

Now it's more discreet. It's gestures, text messages, the internet. That compounds the problem because it is more undercover. It's gone from overt to covert. Governor Christie putting this into law will help us,... It is not just a board policy anymore; it's the law."

Five years ago Ellison put a student/ parent contract into place that also addresses cyber bullying. "If you're on your laptop at one in the morning, if it's impacting our students, we make it our business," says Chapman who summed up the three page policy. "We expect students to A) Don't do it; B) Speak up for yourself; and C) Speak up for others." The policy is a reasonable one, as it differentiates between one-time bad judgment and ongoing mean behavior

Chapman says that when she hears rumblings, she addresses it right away. When needed, she offers refreshers on the policy. In April, Ellison is hosting The Walnut Street Theater's productions aimed at anti-bullying *The Boy Who Cried Bully* for younger grades and *Mean Girlz are Bullies 2* for middle grades.

Character Education, anti-bullying measure, is big at Petway, says Frederico. "We talk about these character traits everywhere. It is not just in the classroom, it's in art and gym and in the cafeteria. How to speak respectfully to each other, how to work cooperatively 'what does it look like? What does it sound like?' "When addressing bullying, Frederico seeks to educate. "We use peer mediation, role play, problem solving, the parents, guidance counselors." They also educate through assemblies and Frederico praises Sue Bacon of the county's Child Assault Prevention (CAP) Program (see box).

Just over a month ago. McCann started a School Safety Team at VHS. "It's myself, four parents, two

student assistant coordinators, two guidance directors, a social worker and our Director of Security.” McCann says they will have a poster in each room of the building “telling kids what to do if they are bullied, informing the kids about how to get help, like a hotline. It does something else, too. It informs the bullies that we are not tolerating it,” They are kicking off the poster contest soon through art classes. Both of these efforts are to involve students in tackling the problem.

The law is changing some other things at VHS. “I’m back to being the disciplinarian,” says McCann. “That used to be the role of the assistant principal. Each school has to have a coordinator. There is

going to be a ‘go to’ group of a guidance counselor, social worker and substance abuse counselor.” McCann says this group will be a safe haven for victims, as those staffers are student advocates. Though the school keeps track of bullying reports, with the law, they will have district wide tracking of that data and also set response times for handling each incident, “The Safety Team is a big help. With 3,000 students, 80 buses coming in every day, we’re the biggest high school in south Jersey. Things happen. That’s why we’re doing what we’re doing. It’s being pro active.” ~

### **Child Assault Prevention (CAP)**

- A state program with offices in each county.
- Sue Bacon is the CAP Coordinator for Cumberland County,
- Provides workshops for teachers, parents and the students. All Vineland elementary and middle schools participate.
- CAP’s motto is that every child deserves to be Safe, Strong, and Free.
- Runs “The No More Bullies. No More Victims’ program for K-8th grade. These Vineland elementary schools have had their students and/or parents introduced to the bully program: Dane Barse, Sabater, D’Ippolito, Durand and Petway.
- Has adult workshops for recognizing/taking action against cyberbullying. For more: CAP Line 856-696-0921 or Cumberland\_county\_cap@yahoo.com

### **Tips for Victims and their Parents**

1. Tell an adult you can trust, “One of the finest compliments is when kids come to you and want to talk to you about a problem,” says McCann. They are trusting me to respond immediately and keep it confidential....”
2. Do it quickly, Chapman says administrators find it harder to address when more time has elapsed.
3. Have a plan for what you could do differently next time. Frederico says there are usually three people involved—the bully, a victim and a witness. “We tell the victim, ‘Stand up for yourself.’ She coaches them through choices, such as telling the bully to stop, walking away or telling an adult. “We also tell the witnesses, ‘you are also responsible. What could you do next time?’”
4. Adults need to listen and validate their child’s feelings, telling is not tattling, also use assertive behavior and be a good model, says Sue Bacon, CAP Coordinator,