

Bullies going digital

What was once limited to
school yards, now online 24/7

By **KATRINA GRANT**
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Bullying is a problem that more and more schools face today. However, the degree of bullying has changed over time. These are not just the times of words, insults and hitting; bullying and bullies have adapted with the digital age.

For a long time, children endured bullying while they were at school, and, when they went home, they didn't have to deal with it.

However, with the technological age and social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype and text messaging and data phones, bullying has become something some kids can't escape.

New Jersey Child Assault Prevention has worked with Washington Township schools for the past seven years to help fight against bullying.

It has a program in place that works with the sixth graders in the district to teach them about bullying and awareness of it.

"We have a two-day workshop at night with the students, parents and teachers for this campaign," Chestnut Ridge Middle School Principal James Barnes

said. "So it's a three-prong approach to it. We want to train and empower our students against this."

This year, the anti-bullying campaign piloted a part of the program to tackle the issue of cyber bullying, calling it Cyber Empowerment.

NJ CAP Director of Curriculum Jeannette Collins and Director of Operations Cheryl Mojta recently came to Chestnut Ridge Middle School to work with sixth-grade students.

Cyber Empowerment was created during a nine-week process where Rowan University students – both education and technology majors – volunteered their time to work alongside NJ CAP generating ideas. Some of those students were on hand at CRMS last week to assist with the workshop.

The aspect of the program presented on Tuesday was just a small portion of the all-encompassing project. Separate workshops will be given to parents and education professionals to help them to better understand cyber bullying and its dangers.

During the workshop, the students were shown Powerpoint presentations and scenario videos.

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Different sections of the presentation dealt with social networking, online gaming, instant messages, sexting and more. Included were situations where the students were asked to think about what they might do in the same circumstance.

In the future, NJ CAP hopes to work with the George Street Players in New Brunswick, to film skits and make the workshop more visual. The students proved to be very knowledgeable about the subjects in the presentations.

"The kids really know a lot about the technology," Barnes said. "We want to empower them when they go online and give them an understanding of what to do when they witness bullying

and how to protect themselves."

With the new section on cyber bullying the school and CAP are looking to expand the program to three days.

"We want to teach them how to handle different situations," Barnes said. "The majority of these kids are witnesses to this. We want them to come forward so we can help. We want them to give us the information so we can correct the situation."