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Secaucus schools kick off anti-bullying campaign

Published: Sunday, October 24, 2010, 9:09 PM

Jean-Pierre Mestanza/The Jersey Journal



Students listen to speakers during the Secaucus school district's anti-bullying campaign kickoff at the Arthur F. Couch Performing Arts Center at Secaucus High School on Friday.

SECAUCUS -- Roughly 900 students packed the Secaucus High School Performing Arts Center on Friday to kick off the town's anti-bullying campaign at its middle and high schools.

"Students are the first line of defense and need to identify and then alert someone if they see someone being bullied," Superintendent of Schools Cynthia Randina told the students.

Several government officials attended the meeting, as well as former NBA player and New Jersey native Eric Williams.

The goal of the campaign is to curb bullying by aggressively enforcing a zero-tolerance policy, said Secaucus High School Principal Robert Berckes. "If I hear of it, if a teacher senses it, it will be addressed right away," Berckes said.

Berckes said nearly all of the bullying problems he encounters are traceable to Facebook, the ubiquitous social networking site, and other technologically-driven vehicles, such as instant messaging.

Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle, of the 37th District in Bergen County, told the crowd that she and Monmouth County Assemblywoman Mary Pat Angelini plan to introduce "Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights" legislation that would set out a specific chain of command for school officials to follow when dealing with incidents of bullying.

After the joint assembly, middle school students were sent to the gym for a lecture by high school football coach Charlie Voorhees, while the high-schoolers stayed for a presentation by North Bergen Detective Lt. Mike Reinke.

According to the New Jersey Child Assault Prevention Project, 42 percent of students have been bullied

online.

The issue has taken on greater urgency since last month's suicide of Tyler Clementi, the Rutgers University who killed himself after his roommate allegedly broadcast his sexual encounter with another man over the Internet.