

National Bullying Expert Addresses Andover School Community

By Jane Slayton
Principal, AE/MS

A New Hampshire educator and bullying expert who calls himself a “family scientist” says children in school today are the “meanest ever,” and they have more ways than ever to express that meanness.

Dr. Malcom Smith of the University of New Hampshire’s Cooperative Extension Service, a nationally renowned researcher and speaker, spoke on February 8 in the AE/MS gym to a hardy crowd of parents, students, and educators who braved storm conditions to hear him. (Related article: page 48)

“I’m a family scientist. As a person who spends my life trying to understand trends in families and children, I’m worried. As a father, I’m extremely worried. As a professor, I’m deeply worried,” Dr. Smith said. “This generation that’s coming up, the generation in school right now ... they are the meanest generation of kids that we’ve ever had, and they have more ways to be mean to each other than any other generation.”

Studies show that bullying affects one out of three public school students. According to a University of Massachusetts study, that number could be even higher, at 50 percent. According to students surveyed by the Kaiser Family Foundation, bullying is a bigger problem in schools than HIV, drugs, and racism.

Before speaking to the Andover group, Dr. Smith took time in the parking lot to mentally prepare himself. He needs the time because of words said against him while he was just a kid. Still recalling the damaging words “farm trash” from a bullying incident in high school and an unnecessary designation as a special education student that led to ongoing bullying occurrences, Dr. Smith, who has studied families and children for more than 30 years, knows all too well that the effects of bullying often stay with a victim for at least five years and even into adulthood.

“The key to understanding bullying is its origin from an imbalance of power,” Dr. Smith said. Repeat bullies have a deficit in social learning and are missing basic values such as manners, civility, and kindness. They think they are better than others, and this has been fostered, according to Smith, by a growing lack of supervision.

“It’s about supervising and be-

ing around. As a parent, that’s really important,” he said, telling parents to communicate with their children, supervise their use of technology like computers, and talk about their day while at the dinner table. “The best way to fight bullying is to establish open lines of communication in the home and make it easy for kids to come to you.”

The number one reason children are bullied in New Hampshire, Dr. Smith said, is sexual orientation. Ninety-four percent of gay kids have been severely bullied. “This is a very vulnerable population,” he said. Other leading reasons for bullying include obesity, having a disability, and race.

Social media is the latest method of bullying, Dr. Smith said. He advised parents to keep computers in the kitchen or other common areas to help prevent their kids from being either the victim or perpetrator of cyber-bullying.

“The biggest myth is those who are bullied are wimps, when in fact they’re experiencing the mental illness of another child. It’s not a rite of passage. Meanness is not a developmental stage,” said Dr. Smith.

Female bullies tend to exclude and use relationship for control, but they are becoming more violent, he noted. Meanwhile boys are more physical when they bully, using extortion or their sexuality.

“What the victim needs is support. What the bully needs is help,” Dr. Smith said. “To stop bullying, children have to take responsibility for their bullying actions; must develop a plan of what they should have done differently to promote social learning; and decide how they going to atone for their actions.”

“The most important thing to do is talk. No longer are we going to sit by and watch. We are becoming a mean culture, and that scares me. It scares me deeply. Parents, educators, and the community can fight bullying by teaching the values of respect, compassion, realistic expectations of others, and generosity,” Dr. Smith said.

The Bullying Information Night was a collaborative effort by the Andover Elementary/Middle School, the AE/MS PTO, and the Andover Girl Scouts. The event was part of the school district’s ongoing strategic planning for student safety and violence prevention.



Mrs. Schultz works with Colin Coolidge to see how many words he can make with his friends at the lunch table with the letters from Valentine’s Day. Photo: Jen Bent

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eighth grade graduation. I know graduation is an important evening, and family members like to plan ahead. This is one of our biggest graduating classes in recent years – 32 students!

While we prepare to send the eighth grade students off, we also are preparing to welcome the next kindergarten class. If your child will be five years old before September 30, 2011, please contact us to receive information regarding kindergarten. We have a registration day in the spring, and we want to have you on the mailing list.

Our school was selected to represent schools across our state and nation by participating in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP is given by the US Department of Education and tells us what American students know and can do in key subject areas. It is the only on-going,

nationally representative assessment that provides this valuable information.

NAEP has been given in schools for nearly 40 years. You may have taken the assessment yourself when you were in school. The results are published in a report called The Nation’s Report Card, which provides reliable student achievement information to educators, parents, and other citizens.

In our school, the NAEP assessment was administered to students in grades four and eight in February in reading, mathematics, or science.

SHARE Day is coming! We are gearing up for the biggest and best SHARE Day ever on Friday, May 13.

Please stop in anytime. Again, I cannot stress enough how important it is for you to come out and support the school budget on Tuesday, March 1, at 7 PM. We have a school to be proud of in our community. Help us keep it that way.

We know you’ve been meaning to support the *Beacon*, but you just haven’t quite gotten...  Well, now you’ve got one! 

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