

Safe and Supportive Schools

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On March 3rd, kids from my school joined hundreds of other kids from the Twin Cities for a rally at the Capitol. We were there to encourage lawmakers to pass the “Safe and Supportive Schools Act” — also known as the anti-bullying bill. This bill will take Minnesota from having the weakest anti-bullying law in the country to the strongest. At the rally there were many kids who held signs that listed how they had been bullied. Not surprising since “11 percent of all kids are bullied weekly; over 30 percent (say) they’re viewed as different.”

When I interviewed Sophie Rothenberger for my article on South High School she was happy that her school had specific policies to prevent bullying. The school also has counselors that the kids can talk with — even the kids who are the bullies. My school also takes this topic very serious. The Southside Family Charter School 2013-2014 Family Handbook includes a section

about their Bullying Prohibition Policy:

“Bullying, like other violent or disruptive behavior, is conduct that interferes with students’ ability to learn and teachers’ ability to educate students in a safe environment... it is the school’s intent to prevent bullying and to take action to investigate, respond, remediate, and discipline those acts of bullying which have not been successfully prevented.”

This is important not only for kids who get picked on, but if you’re behaving like a bully there should be someone you can talk with to get help. We are all told that if we are bullied — or see someone being bullied — we should talk with our teachers and our parents.

This was something I had to do when a few girls on my bus started teasing and taunting my friends and me. No one was hitting or kicking anyone, but these girls were trying to make us upset, perhaps even provoking us to react with hitting or by crying. They know that their behavior will get them in trouble but they don’t seem to care. We usually try very hard to simply ignore them, though this doesn’t stop them from picking on us.

I have talked to the bus driver, my parents and teachers at the school. They are aware of the problem and are helping me find ways to deal with this problem. Those girls still tease us, but there are now times where it doesn’t bug me as much as it used to. Some of my research for this article contained other ideas and activities to help kids deal with being bullied. This information can be found at the outfront.org and pacer.org websites.

Here are a couple of the ideas I thought were interesting:

Irene Henderson of Eagan, MN knows what it feels like to be bullied. She knows how alone it can make someone feel. So with the help of her mom and her dance studio, Irene created a campaign to show others that they didn’t have to go through what she did alone. She gathered dancers and parents at her studio, decorated lavishly with orange, to share her story

and invite everyone to sign a bullying prevention pledge.

Lauren and Victoria Coaxum are teen sisters and the co-founders of Think Before You Type (TBYT) — an anti-cyberbullying and positive self-esteem campaign. They were inspired to start TBYT last summer after seeing a lot of cyberbullying on the Internet, specifically on Twitter. Their mission is to raise awareness about cyberbullying, promote positive self-esteem, and encourage young people to use the Internet for good.

I also liked reading some of the stories that other kids wrote and the videos that they posted about their experiences

with bullies and how it has affected them (www.pacer.org/bullying/stories/). Especially the poem, “The Dark Won’t Just Disappear.”

For many students like me, bullying and harassment makes it hard to concentrate in class, interact with others and just enjoy being a kid. Schools should be safe and welcoming for ALL students. Take some time to check out the websites mentioned earlier in this article — on your own or with your friends and parents — to learn about the many things you can do today to change things at your school and across Minnesota!

