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Virginia Schools Students Face New Type Of Study Program This Fall

By Patricia Hawke

Virginia schools students recently have returned to school. Along with the studies and coursework they expected to face, they have a new program with which to deal — a bullying prevention program.

Bullies are prevalent in all schools today. It has been a growing problem for the past decade. The emotional trauma experienced by victims of bullying is, in some cases, beyond belief. The results of bullying, both upon the victim and the bully, also are significant. We have seen some of these results in our news headlines — shootings at schools, suicides, self-mutilation through cutting, depression and extreme emotional distress — and these only the victims. Bullies, many times, develop very serious violent behavior with many ending up in prison; abuse their spouses, children and/or elderly parents; and sexually abuse others.

Bullying has become a real problem in the Virginia schools, with 12,709 incidents of crime and violence against Virginia schools students reported in the 2003–2004 school year. These incidents included physical assault with and without weapons, threats, bullying and one attempted rape. Another 89 incidents were reported on Virginia schools property that involved firearms. Another 21,128 incidents of fighting with no or minor injuries were reported by the Virginia schools, and 1,336 incidents of fighting that resulted in serious injury.

Bullying occurs when one or more students repeatedly subject other students to negative actions over a period of time. Bullying includes intentional physical attacks (such as hitting), obscene gestures, intentional exclusion from a group, and verbal attacks (such as threatening, malicious teasing, and spreading rumors).

Bullies are impulsive and hotheaded. They generally (but not always) have more physical strength than other children their age. Bullies lack empathy and have dominant personalities, a need to control and prove they are tough. They defy authority, do not conform to rules, have a positive attitude toward violence, and have poor conflict-resolution skills. Many times, bullies are children from abusive families — but not always.

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The Virginia schools are determined to stop the abuse in their schools. They have teamed with the Virginia Department of Health and Virginia Commonwealth University to implement the Olweus Bully Prevention Program, which began this fall. The program is funded by a grant of \$290,615 from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for each of the three years the program will run, between 2006 and 2009.

The Olweus Program was first used throughout Norway and addresses individual and bystander behaviors. It promotes social skills to eliminate the negative interaction between bullies and victims. It will promote parent and community education and collaboration within the Virginia schools.

According to State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H., the Olweus Program will directly address the behavioral tendencies that lead to becoming a bully or a victim. It will work to prevent all forms of violence in the Virginia schools that is directed by or at children and adolescents.

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found the program has many

benefits. The Olweus Program:

- Reduced student reports of being bullied and bullying others by 30 to 70 percent;
- Significantly reduced students' reports of general antisocial behavior, such as vandalism, fighting and theft;
- Significantly improved classroom order and discipline; and
- Fostered a more positive attitude toward schoolwork and school.

The Virginia schools expect similar results across the commonwealth. Lessening bullying in the Virginia schools, means the Virginia schools students can put more focus on their coursework and scholastic achievement, and teachers can focus less on discipline and more on teaching. It is a plus for everyone.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. For more information on Virginia schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/Virginia/index.html>

Virginia Police Chiefs Target Virginia Schools Youth For Leadership Training

By Patricia Hawke

After the Columbine High School shootings in Colorado in 1999, the Virginia police departments across the commonwealth quickly introduced tactical training for police and school resource officers (SROs). They were taught several methods for handling Virginia schools' students with weapons.

Members of the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police wanted to do more than just react to situations in the Virginia schools. They wanted to take preventative measures. So, in 2002, the Commonwealth Youth Conference for Leadership Effectiveness (CYCLE) was created.

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CYCLE is a one-week, leadership training program for Virginia schools' students who are entering high school. Held once every summer at Virginia Tech's campus in Blacksburg, Virginia, it has become one of the most successful and meaningful programs for Virginia schools' youth, focusing on the basics of leadership.

Virginia schools' students are given the opportunity to:

- Gain an understanding of their own leadership potential,
- Identify positive leadership characteristics,
- Gain a better understanding of themselves,
- Learn how to better relate to others,
- Learn to use effective communication to foster positive interactions,
- Gain problem analysis skills to assist in decision making,
- Understand the value of teamwork,
- Understand their own role within their communities, and
- Learn and embrace values of diversity.

The hopeful result of the program is to provide Virginia schools' students with skills to help them become valuable and contributing members of society, as well as to make Virginia communities safer places to live. If Virginia schools' children are given leadership skills and positive reinforcement, then situations such as Columbine may be forestalled.

To attend CYCLE, Virginia schools' students must go through a lengthy application process. The selection process begins in the fall of each year with interested Virginia schools' students applying to their school's SRO. Accepted applicants and their parents receive notification from their SROs in early May of the following year. The selection process ensures that all areas throughout the commonwealth are properly represented each year at CYCLE.

The program looks for the "rising" 10th grade students -- those with recognized leadership potential, who have not yet found their place in the world. Virginia schools' students must be:

- Recommended by their school's SRO,
- A rising student, entering the 10th grade at application,
- Between the ages of 13 and 15 years,
- Have no major infractions on their discipline records,
- Have a minimum grade point average of 2.0,
- Complete an essay on an assigned topic, and
- Provide a letter of support for their desire to attend CYCLE, which may be written by anyone chosen by the student.

CYCLE is sponsored and chaired by the Virginia Police Chief's Foundation, the charitable and educational arm of the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police. They work with corporations, civic groups, police agencies, and citizens to raise the needed funds to support CYCLE. The current cost of

\$600 per Virginia schools' student is occasionally underwritten totally by a police department's training budget for the youth in its jurisdiction. This covers tuition, lodging, meals and learning materials. The local police departments in which students reside always supply the transportation. CYCLE is always provided entirely at no cost to the students.

Thanks to the Police Chiefs of Virginia and the work of police departments across the commonwealth, Virginia schools' students are given the opportunity to participate in an exceptionally unique program that may affect the rest of their lives, as well as many others.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more information on Virginia schools visit

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