

Gladstone keeps eye on bullying

GLADSTONE — Bullying has always been an issue in schools and the Gladstone Area Schools are no exception. When it comes to bullying in Gladstone, the overall goal is to be more proactive than reactive, but when incidences occur each school handles situations in an overall similar fashion.

Dave Ballard, the Gladstone Junior High School principal, said each school has a different handbooks because different ages require different procedures to follow, but overall bullying is handled similarly in each building.

“Each one of us addresses every concern or complaint immediately and quickly,” he said.

Jones Elementary Principal Kristina Hansen said when any information regarding incidents like bullying are brought to the school’s attention by

either a student or parent, the administrative staff will try to gather more information by talking with students, teachers, staff members, and parents.

“Everything that comes to our attention is addressed and taken care of. I just think that we do our due diligence in making sure that everything that is brought to our attention is addressed and taken care of,” she said.

When a situation calls for it, public safety will also be brought in to help.

Ballard said safety of students and everyone at the school is very important, so if a behavior rises to the level of public safety there is no hesitation to involve them.

Andrew Jacques, the assistant principal and the athletic director at the high school, said it does not matter how big or small the issue is, every issue is always taken seriously.

Ballard said in every school getting parents involved is always part of the solution when dealing with situations like bullying.

“If we do have behavior problems, we do make contact with parents at home and we do have staffings to discuss any situations and get parents involved in the solutions,” he said.

When it comes to the consequences of bullying, the responses to each situation are tailored to the situation and the information collected.

Ballard said the handbooks address a wide range of behaviors and what the associated consequences are for those behaviors.

“Once we identify the behavior and that it actually took place after talking with students and people involved, we have a protocol and procedure. We are consistent, it’s not random. We are consistent with our application of our consequences and addressing different situations,” he said.

To be proactive in dealing with situations like bullying, each school has programs that are dedicated in educating students on positive social and

emotional behaviors.

Hansen said a lot of efforts are put in to preventative measures to educate students on positive peer interactions.

One of those efforts would be the new behavioral interventionist program at both Jones and Cameron Elementary.

The program is a new way for the schools to improve the lives of students with behavioral issues by having new “*behavioral interventionist*” positions at the schools. These individuals are tasked with educating those students on their social-emotional well-being, providing them with the social-emotional skill set needed so less behavioral issues occur, incorporating parents in the individual behavioral plans, and teaching other teachers in the school on how to look out for these students.

Cameron also is a positive behaviors interventions and supports (PBIS) school.

Lori Neurohr, the principal at Cameron, said there are monthly assemblies with the focus continuously changing to the specific needs of the students. She said they use data recorded at the school to figure out what needs to be addressed each month.

Neurohr explained instead of telling kids what they can and cannot do during these assemblies, they instead teach the students how to properly handle different situations.

The junior high has the Braves Plan and the Botvin LifeSkills training.

Ballard said the Braves Plan is an incentive program for students rewarding them on positive behavior. Attendance, homework and overall behavior are the type of things looked at for the incentive program.

For over a decade all sixth graders go through the Botvin’s Program. Ballard said the program provides strategies for students on how to handle peer pressure and other social situations that occur. He said it is a very successful program and they are looking to expand the training to include other grades too.

Although there aren't specific programs at the high school level like there are in the other schools due to credit loads, Jacques said there are other proactive strategies used.

These strategies focus on reiterating expectations whenever students are gathered for assemblies and the relationships built in the school.

"I believe that our staff – we do a really good job at forming relationships with our kids so the kids feel they can trust us. So when situations arise they can come to us when they need help or come to us to celebrate something," Jacques said.

He explained they provide proactive strategies to students when they're struggling with situations so they can use them for situations faced in high school but also in the workforce when they graduate. Some of these strategies include sticking up for themselves or others, communicating and asking for help.

Even with the proactive system at the Gladstone schools, there have been cases of frustrated parents with how situations have been dealt with.

Some parents have even gone to Gladstone Area School Board meetings and voiced their concerns. Ballard said during those meetings administrative staff can't reply during public comments so more information regarding the situation is missing.

"Many times when a parent makes a complaint at a board level meeting they neglect to approach us about it first and find out more facts before they make a comment that goes to the public. That's a little discouraging," he said.

Hansen said the isolated events that do occur at Gladstone get more attention because with all of the proactive programs in place serious situations are far and few in-between.
