

Students in line for course in avoiding school violence

01:00 AM EDT on Thursday, April 26, 2007

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WOONSOCKET -- Woonsocket Middle School may soon be introducing another topic to its students: bully prevention.

The School Committee is considering bringing the Partnership to Address Violence through Education program to students who have received detention or are on school suspension. Taught by retired officer John Reis, a former commander of the Providence Police Department's Youth Services Bureau, the workshop will address issues such as stereotyping, types of violence, what happens to people who don't "fit in," and why people bully.

"We need to try to reach out and do whatever we can to further educate faculty, staff, and students on these issues," Schools Supt. Maureen B. Macera said.

Macera said the School Committee will consider the program at its next meeting and, if approved, it will begin immediately. The program, which will be financed through the Woonsocket Substance Abuse Task Force, is one of several programs administrators are eyeing after a number of fights plagued the middle school this year.

The district had also hoped to bring in youth advocates and nonviolence training sessions through the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence, but Macera said she is still trying to secure money for the program.

"We've been in discussion with the state, but there just isn't any money," she said.

Paulette Hamilton, a partner in the Partnership, said the 20 to 30 children mandated to participate in the six-week course will use time normally spent on punishment to learn how to turn their behavior around and how their actions affect others, she said.

"It gives them a chance to really do some internalizing and figure out how they got to where they are and learn new ways to maybe make a positive approach," Hamilton said.

On the final day of workshop, the students participate in relationship and team-building activities at Camp Davis in Charlestown. After completing the program, the students will become mentors for younger children, she said.

Woonsocket Middle School principal Patrick McGee said the program will address a significant need for adolescent students.

"This is another opportunity to have people ... work with our kids so they can work on their issues in a nonviolent way," he said.

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