

Safe School Ambassadors®

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Schools Begin New Student-led Anti-Bullying Program

San Francisco, CA –Seven San Francisco Unified School District schools will pilot the Safe School Ambassadors program to enhance current anti-bullying, harassment and tolerance programs and curricula already in place.

Beginning with a two-day training by the non-profit organization Community Matters, students will be empowered and equipped with nonviolent communication skills to prevent and stop mistreatment, cruelty and violence among their peers.

Three of the trainings for students are taking place this spring at Excelsior Middle School on April 11th and 12th; Mission High School on April 16th-17th; and James Lick Middle School on May 7th-8th. Four additional schools are being scheduled for early fall.

For far too many students, schools are places where they don't feel welcome, safe, and included. According to a national study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 75% of students say that they have been bullied at school. In addition, *every day*, an estimated 160,000 students stay home from school across the nation due to fear of attack or intimidation.

And this bullying is getting younger, meaner, and more difficult to identify than ever before due to access to technology such as MySpace and YouTube. Perhaps most disturbing is that it is also becoming more acceptable among young people. Research shows that 70-85% of students have been passive bystanders to peer mistreatment. Their silence amounts to tacit consent, which further reinforces an environment of cruelty and mistreatment.

"Students see, hear, and know what adults don't. They can intervene in ways adults can't, but usually don't," said Rick Phillips, Executive Director of Community Matters and co-founder of the Safe School Ambassadors program. "They often fear retaliation or simply don't know what to do."

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The Safe School Ambassadors program removes these obstacles by very carefully identifying and selecting socially-influential “opinion leaders” from the diverse cliques and groups at school. They are trained in nonviolent intervention and communication skills to use among their peer groups to prevent and stop cruelty and violence. The program is sustained by utilizing regularly-scheduled, small group meetings, in which Ambassadors strengthen their skills, share their experiences, and record their interventions.

The San Francisco Foundation donated \$15,000 for the program and the District is providing a \$15,000 match.

“We see this pilot program as a valuable resource to enhance our existing efforts to improve school climate, attendance and academic performance.” said Trish Bascom, Associate Superintendent for Student Support Services. “We are grateful to the San Francisco Foundation for making this possible.”

Safe School Ambassadors is a program of Community Matters, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization that specializes in: youth violence prevention, youth development, and sustainable school and community partnerships. Headquartered in Sebastopol, California, Community Matters has been in operation since 1995. For more information, visit www.community-matters.org or www.safeschoolambassadors.org.

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