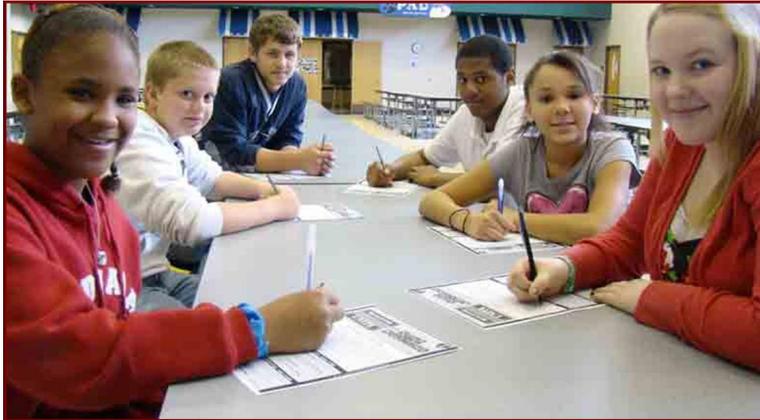


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MCAS Students taking “Bullying Bystanders Pledge”



Students from Elston Middle School take Hey U.G.L.Y.'s Bullying Bystanders Unite pledge. Pictured (L-R) Paris Johnson, Brent Barton, Jay Hixon, Joshua Campbell, Christian Lepage, and Logan Jones

Michigan City, Ind. – Dr. Barbara Eason-Watkins, Superintendent of Michigan City Area Schools (MCAS) in Michigan City, Ind. is encouraging students and teachers to take bullying seriously. All three MCAS middle schools (Elston, Barker, and Krueger) and Michigan City High School are taking the Bullying Bystanders Unite Pledge, committing to safely interceding when they see other students being bullied.

Kelly Martin-Fargo of Elston Middle School reported that over 600 students in Grades 6 through 8 have already taken the Pledge.

The pledge is part of a nation-wide effort created by the non-profit organization Hey U.G.L.Y. – Unique Gifted Lovable You - to educate bystanders to bullying situations how to take action by following certain safety practices developed with the help of the Michigan City Police Department (MCPD) and made possible through a grant from the Michigan City Community Enrichment Corporation. The steps are listed on the website www.BullyingBystandersUnite.org.

Betty Hoeffner is co-founder and president of Hey U.G.L.Y., which is dedicated to giving youth the empathetic and intellectual tools they need to empower them to be part of the solution to bullying. She was inspired to create Bullying Bystanders Unite after a parent asked her to help her son who had been thrown on the ground and repeatedly kicked in the face by a bully.

Hoeffner's first call was to her friend, Marty Corley, a detective at MCPD. "He explained to me that unless there were eyewitnesses or video footage, not much could be done other than the parents filing a report," Hoeffner says. "It's the same for schools. A principal can't reprimand the bully unless there's proof or a witness."

Bullying Bystanders Unite focuses on educating young people and adults how to safely come to the aid of someone being bullied by becoming witnesses. Hoeffner says people who take the Pledge are making a personal commitment to take a stand against bullying by reporting bullying situations.

Michigan City Police Chief Mark Swistek has endorsed the Bullying Bystanders Unite campaign because it considers children's safety as the most important aspect of dealing with bullying behavior, especially when it becomes physical. The police chief agrees with Hey U.G.L.Y.'s stance of recommending bystanders observe from a safe distance and seek assistance of others before intervening.

"Be careful not to enter into the struggle unless you can be assisted by others," advises Chief Swistek. "Be the best witness you can be by observing or recording the occurrence and other necessary information. This rule also applies to adults. If you're unsure of your abilities or cannot be assisted by others, we encourage witnesses to immediately call 911 and stand by to provide us with the information related to the incident. You can also report anonymously by calling 219.873.1488."

According to parenting expert and author, Dr. Michele Bora, 85 percent of school kids are bystanders. "They're the missing link, the silent majority," Bora said on a recent edition of "Dateline NBC."

Elston counselors organized the school's Bullying Bystanders Unite event. Kathy Angelo created a montage of short video clips focused on statistics about bullying and testimonies from students who took a stand against the behavior. The counselors role-played a scene about being U.G.L.Y. – Unique, Gifted Lovable You. Counselor Judy Kovalcik explained the pledge form and asked for signatures of students who wanted to help stop bullying.

"I am very proud of my counselors for taking charge of this important event," said Principal Martin-Fargo, adding that the Hey U.G.L.Y. anti-bullying materials provided a vehicle for the school to take a stand against bullying."

A flood of recent media reports about kids being bullied has raised the profile of what some people dismiss as an age-old problem. But school officials, such as Martin-Fargo, as well as parents and police officials are tackling bullying head-on and identifying solutions.

"As we look at our community schools and schools across the nation, we often see the violence of children," Chief Swistek said. "The discussion of bullying may assist our children with better alternatives and ways to report and address the issue."

Hoeffner has contacted the National Association of Police Chiefs (NAPC) to make the Bullying Bystanders Unite campaign available to police departments across the nation.

To find out how to participate in Bullying Bystanders Unite, link to the safety rules and pledge go to: <http://BullyingBystandersUnite.org> or e-mail a request for an information packet to heyugly@heyugly.org. Also available is Hey U.G.L.Y.'s quickly assimilated Stop Bullying Task Force Program, a step-by-step guide for schools to set up an in-school student stop bullying task force which can be found <http://StopBullyingTaskforce.org>.