

# GODDARD SCHOOL COMBATS BULLYING WITH COMMUNITY GAMES

By Antonio Prado • February 5, 2011



*At The Goddard School Community Games on Saturday, Jane (pre-K student), Ellie (Get Set Class student- red hair), Riley (pre-toddler student-on the floor), Lucas (pre-toddler Student), and Lucas' father, Erik, toss footballs through the goal post.*

**HOCKESSIN, DEL.** — As surprising as it may be, bullying prevention can start as early as pre-school where the buildup of self-esteem not only allows children to stand up for themselves against bullying in the long run but prevents the development of would-be bullies.

The crucial development of childrens' confidence was the main message to take home from Community Games, an anti-bullying program held at The Goddard School in Hockessin Saturday, Feb. 5. To that end, children and parents learned how playful learning teaches children to get along with others and respect each other's differences. Children threw footballs over the goal post to the cheers of parents and teachers, decorated banners, colored football cutouts and made their way to the dramatic play area to play with other children in the toy kitchen.

All 360 locations of The Goddard School, the largest pre-kindergarten franchise in the United States, participated in the community play day to educate parents and young children about ways to combat bullying from a young age, spokeswoman Jordy Patano said.

"There have been many terrible incidences as of late with bullying – both in school as well as cyber related – that have caused children to even take their own lives," she said. "This is a grave issue of interest for parents right now."

Bullying doesn't necessarily start in preschool, Goddard Systems Inc. Director of Education, Sue Adair said. Bullying actually escalates in the middle and high school levels. Therefore, Goddard tries to prevent that negative behavior later in their scholastic career with a firm foundation of friendship, compassion, cooperation and kindness, she said. The Goddard Guide to Getting Along fosters acquisition of these skills.

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“Our goal is to build self esteem in young children,” she said. “This creates confident children who are independent thinkers and who can solve problems on their own. Our goal is to help children learn to play with one another, get along and be respectful of differences. Confident children tend to avoid being bullied and also avoid becoming bullies.”

That is going to lead to a successful scholastic career in the long run, Hockessin Goddard School owner Genelle Craig said.

“If you’re not confident, it can bring down your self-esteem, which is already low,” Craig said. “Everybody has to find their niche when they get older –whether it’s sports or Odyssey of the Mind – and if you’re not confident enough to join those groups or confident enough in your abilities to do those activities, you’re going to shy away from those activities – a fundamental part of the school experience.”

But the focus on individual children is not enough, Craig said. Therefore, Goddard’s Community Games nationwide was an effort to instill in everyone that total community involvement also prevents bullying.

“You need to have friends involved and neighbors involved,” she said “And you need to have a sense that you belong to a community.”

Rich Lietzke, of Hockessin, brought his twin girls Ariel and Eden, both 3, and their aunt Valerie Bica to Community Games. Ariel and Eden recently enrolled in Goddard’s pre-school class.

“You build self-confidence at home with a lot of love, making them feel safe,” Lietzke said.

And the strong community ties help as well, said Lietzke, whose father was a school psychologist and whose mother was a teacher.

“I get to know my neighbors. We’re here today to get to know some of the other parents,” he said. “Taking the time to do these sorts of things – knowing the teachers, knowing the other kids in the community – can really help.”

Eric Stephenson, of Prices Corner, watched as his son, Lucas, played with the Lietzke girls in the dramatic play area. It was also a chance for Stephenson to socialize with other parents and pick their brains about how they approach childrearing.

“I can see firsthand as a parent how he is around other kids,” Stephenson said. “Is he very friendly? Does he get up right in their face? I can, as a parent, start reinforcing the message that he learns here at school. This is the way you treat others.”

Stephenson’s wife, Jen, teaches the 1-year-olds at Goddard. Even at this age, she works with them to learn the appropriate behavior in the classroom. For instance, if Susie wants to take away a toy that Johnnie is using, she makes it a teachable moment.

“If something like that occurs, we’ll give them the words to say, ‘Johnnie is playing with this toy. We’ll go and find you another toy until Johnnie is done and you can have a turn,’” Jen Stephenson said. “And if they get physical, we’ll practice gentle touches to make sure they’re learning how to be gentle with their friends.

“They actually do understand at a very young age,” she added. “When they’re doing something that they should not be doing, they’ll stop and look at you to say, ‘Are they watching me?’ ... They are like little sponges at that age.”