

## HILLSBOROUGH PRESCHOOL TACKLES STATE ANTI-BULLYING LAW AT PRESCHOOL LEVEL

By Pamela Sroka-Holzmann • January 14, 2011



The Goddard School in Hillsborough have plan to present an anti-bullying program in the near future. Gus, 4, helps his twin brother Rubin with his snowpants as the Pre-K class gets ready to go outside to play. (Kathy Johnson / MyCentralJersey)

**HILLSBOROUGH** — Following Governor Chris Christie's earlier this month signing anti-bully legislation into law, a Hillsborough preschool is taking steps to prevent bullying with children as young as age 2.

Susan Hoy, owner of The Goddard School® at Kingsbridge Center, said she believes bullying can start as early as toddler age, noting children as soon as they learn verbal skills, can act out against each other.

At Goddard, which has about 85 school franchises statewide and 360 nationally, administrators are doing what they can to prevent bullying before it begins — at the preschool level.

To help jump start the effort, the township's Goddard School and others, are hosting a "Community Games" event on Feb. 5. The daylong event will focus on fun and enrichment, but also teach children about playing with others and accepting each other's differences, Hoy said.

"In addition to their ABC's and 123's, preschool children are learning and developing life skills that will shape who they grow into as adults," said Sue Adair, director of education and quality assurance for Goddard Systems Inc. "One of these building blocks is learning to play well with others and accept each other's differences."

The township's Goddard school opened in March 1999 with about 44 children ages infant to fourth grade. Today, there are 175 children enrolled and 36 employees. All employees, Hoy said, are trained to alleviate bullying through a variety of measures.

One example is simply by using positive language designed to diminish tension. Instead of an instructor telling a child to "Stop running," they might say, "Lets use our walking feet." The positive language diminishes the need for a child to become defensive.

Hoy said if two children start tugging at a toy and yelling at each other, a Goddard teacher is trained to calmly diffuse the situation by asking the children how they can work out the problem in a fair manner.

While the "anti-bullying bill of rights" had been in the works for several months, it was accelerated in the state legislature after 18-year-old Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi in September committed suicide. The suicide occurred after Clementi's then college roommate and another Rutgers student used a webcam to spy on Clementi during an encounter in the dorm with another man.

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Hoy said she believes there's an importance in teaching preschoolers everyone in the world is different — through race, how they dress, where they come from, their religious beliefs and other things.

“We enforce that we are all different and we don't have to do everything the same,” Hoy said.

While a typical day at Goddard School does include academics, creative arts, cognitive skills, music, motor skills, computers and science and nature studies for toddlers and up, Hoy said recess is equally as important. Most bullying attacks happen on the playground, Hoy said, stating the school needs to continue recess to address the situation as it happens.