

Casey cites Centennial as 'model' in bullying education

By Gary Weckselblatt Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, March 9, 2015 3:00 pm

Sen. Bob Casey described the Centennial School District as a “model” in how schools should attack the problem of bullying, which he said affects nearly one in every three American students between the ages of 12 and 18.

“I’d like to make what you’re doing here the standard,” Casey said. “I hope other schools imitate or replicate it. You stand as a model on a topic others would not like to confront.”

Pennsylvania’s Democratic senator visited William Tennent High School on Monday to push his Safe Schools Improvement Act, bipartisan legislation that requires districts to specifically prohibit bullying and harassment, including conduct based on a student’s actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or religion.

It ensures that schools focus on effective prevention programs to better prevent and respond to incidents of bullying. Additionally, it requires that states report data on incidents of bullying and harassment to the U.S.

Department of Education.

“We have to go district by district, school by school, and plead with them to do what you’re doing,” Casey said.

The district has implemented programs in all grades to help students and adults connect in handling bullying behaviors and conflicts.

For example, administrators are trained to handle bullying concerns and complaints through a comprehensive reporting and response system.

One specific program, Girls Unlimited, is used in collaboration with the Peace Center, which has years of experience helping schools deal with conflict resolution.

It’s designed to provide girls in fourth and seventh grades with a forum to discuss issues and pressures they’re facing. The goal of the program, which runs one hour a day for a week, is to help girls develop



Pennsylvania Sen. Bob Casey speaks with Centennial Superintendent Mundy about his legislation to have school districts confront bullying.

social awareness, empathy and responsibility within the context of demonstrating respect for others.

“Districts can’t do this alone. Our partnership with the Peace Center is critical,” said Joyce Mundy, Centennial’s superintendent. “This legislation empowers superintendents to take on this issue.”

Mundy wrote her doctoral dissertation on bullying, and has been an advocate for such programs as an assistant principal in Souderton and as principal in New Hope-Solebury that help students feel safe and connected in school.

She traveled to Washington, D.C., each year to lobby for similar measures and attended President Obama’s summit on bullying.

“I’m so excited with what the senator had to say,” she said. “It affirms that all the work we’ve done with students is making an impact.”

Mark Miller, vice president of both the Centennial School Board and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, presented Casey with a pin designed by the PSBA that illustrates “diversity and equality for children.”

“If we don’t break the cycle of bullying it follows you to adulthood,” Miller said, citing the high-profile Miami Dolphins bullying scandal as an example.

Casey, who answered several questions from middle and high school students Monday, said bullying must not be looked at as a “rite of passage. It’s a much more urgent problem that it was when I was growing up.”

The advent of technology, including text-messaging, social media and social networking, worsens the problem as victims cannot escape harassment when they go home at night.

“It follows them from the moment they wake until the moment they go to sleep,” he said. “This legislation will ensure that schools districts across the country take proactive steps to combat bullying and protect children.”

He also continued to commend the Centennial students for “standing up as examples that show leadership on a tough issue. You’ve chosen to take on a problem.”