

# The DALLAS POST

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Serving the communities of the Dallas and Lake-Lehman School Districts

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## Bullying in school: Dallas administrators offer their opinions

By SARAH HITE  
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Kathleen McCarthy, principal of Wycallis Elementary, knows about bullying - she's seen it firsthand as an administrator and when she was a child.

"Someone wrote a book about 'mean girls' as if they invented it," she said. "They've been around forever, even in the 1940s and '50s."

While the definitions of bullying have changed over the years, one thing is certain in the minds of Dallas School District administrators - it's still a problem in schools today.

### Early prevention

The approach to handling conflicts has transformed to tackle the problem before it even starts, and Superintendent Frank Galicki said it's important to emphasize respect as the fundamental lesson for students to learn.

"We have to lay the foundation in the lower grades so they can carry the skills with them throughout middle school and high school," he said.

Betsy Jerome, a guidance counselor at Dallas Elementary, said students are taught early - and often - that basic behaviors need to be learned to avoid bullying in future years.

The Dallas Post contacted Back Mountain school administrators for input regarding bullying in schools. This story contains information from those who responded to our request.

"In kindergarten, there is a program that teaches kids about social skills, self-control and how to ignore something they find annoying," she said.

She said programs continue in different forms from kindergarten through fifth-grade to reinforce those initial lessons.

"We preach to them, 'Have you done everything you can do?'" Jerome said. "If students come to

us for help, we ask them to go back and try those skills that they've learned."

She also said the school focuses on building students' self-confidence so they can assert themselves in a conflict.

"For kindergarten through second grade, we focus on 'brave talk,'" said Jerome. "It's talking assertively to tell each other what they don't like and learning how to deal with the situation and not become a victim."

Brian Bradshaw, Dallas High School assistant principal, said the strategy for eliminating bullying is digging down to find the underlying issue within the con-

flict, which he said is more effective than "bringing down the hammer."

"We have to boil it down ... things get blown out of proportion," he said. "They realize that what happened wasn't as big of a deal as they thought."

McCarthy said younger students need to understand responsibility when it comes to difficult situations.

"They need to know the difference between tattling and telling," she said. "Tattling is if they don't like the way someone is looking at them. Telling is if someone hurts their feelings or hurts them physically. Telling is a

responsibility."

### Cyberbullying

As students grow older, technology becomes a more important part of their lives - and administrators say this offers another avenue for bullying, often called cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is using the Internet, whether it's e-mail or social networking sites, to cause intentional harm to another. Text messaging and smart phones also make cyberbullying a more expedient - and damaging - form of bullying.

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## READING WITH TUX



BILL TARUTIS/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Five-year-old Chloe Dudick gets a hug from Tux, mascot of the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins hockey team, at the Back Mountain Memorial Library. Tux and two hockey players visited the library to promote the importance of reading. For additional photos, please turn to page 3.

## BACK MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

### Harveys Lake may join BMT partnership

By SARAH HITE  
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#### WHAT'S NEXT

The next meeting of the Back Mountain Community Partnership will be held at 3 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 16 in the Sandy & Marlene Insalaco Hall at Misericordia University.

Harveys Lake Borough may be the seventh municipality to join the Back Mountain Community Partnership.

Francis Kopko, a council member from the borough, attended the partnership's meeting on November 18 to explore the possibility of entering into the fraternal organization, which aims to promote cooperation between municipalities within the Dallas and Lake-Lehman school districts.

Kopko said he was at the meeting as an observer, but Harveys Lake Borough has always had an interest in participating.

"We want to take advantage of the unity of this Back Mountain organization," he said.

Kingston Township Chairman James Reino Jr. said the protocol for joining the organization includes receiving unanimous approval from all participating municipalities. He added that the partnership's mission is to strengthen support among Back Mountain communities.

The current members of the partnership are Dallas Borough and Dallas, Franklin, Jackson, Kingston and Lehman town-

ships.

In other news ...

• Joe Chacke of the NEPA Alliance told the group that two bids have been received for the state Conservation Works! project, set to begin in Kingston and Lehman townships. The project aims to update municipalities in order to be more energy efficient. Chacke said the bid will be awarded in December.

• The group voted to revise a drafted agreement in the purchase of a radar speed trailer for five of the municipalities.

• The trailer will cost Dallas Borough and Dallas, Kingston, Jackson and Lehman townships \$1,300 each, and Lehman Township Supervisor Ray Iwanoski said the repairs for the trailer should also be shared equally. The written agreement stated that repairs would be covered by

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## Special kids are real 'STARZ'

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### MORE INFO:

For more information about the Guided Starz or to contact Blanard, visit www.westsidestarz.com.

The cheer of the Guided Starz, a cheering team for special needs children, is bold and brazen, accompanied by inspirational hits like "Don't Stop Believin'" by '80s rock band Journey and backed by danceable beats.

"We are the Guided Starz, and we're here to shine. Open up your eyes, and let us blow your mind," they sing.

Lauren Konopke, 10, of Kingston, shimmies toward the center of the floor along with the others and is then hoisted to the top of the group as the team makes its final impression on the audience. "Starz!" they shout in unison.

And judging by reactions from parents, coaches and cheering

"buddies," that's just what they are.

Coach Gina Masters, of Dallas, said the 3-year-old team has made a world of difference for her son, 7-year-old Logan, who has a rare condition called Smith-Magenis syndrome.

Smith-Magenis syndrome is a developmental disorder due to a microdeletion within the 17th chromosome. According to the Parents and Researchers Interested in Smith-Magenis Syndrome (PRISMS) website, it is characterized by physical and behavioral features such as subtle facial abnormalities, hoarse speech and hyperactivity.

Masters said Logan, once a shy and reserved child, can now be seen running around during practices at the Joan Harris Conservatory for the Arts in Luzerne and chatting up the girls on the team.

"He loves being the center of attention," she said. "He loves being around the other kids."

The group has seven team members and nine team "buddies," or cheerleaders from other teams within the West Side Starz organization who help the Guided Starz with cheers. They practice once a week at the Joan Harris Center, and some practices are more productive than others.

"If they cooperate, we try to push them a little further," said Masters, who just became the coach this year. "Some days we have more breaks than practice time."

On this particular day, team members practiced their cheer three times before breaking to play "Hide and Seek." The week prior they had omitted practice completely, having performed for hundreds at the seventh annual Cougar Cheer and Dance Challenge at Misericordia University.

Konopke's mother, Maria, said Lauren loves to cheer and is plagued with anticipation and excitement before each competi-



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Francesca Scarano is assisted by her friends Sabrina Scott and Amanda Josulevicz during a cheerleading competition.

tion. "She sleeps in her uniform," said Maria.

Lauren has a rare, unnamed condition characterized by the deletion of chromosome 10 at conception, which affects development and behavior in children. Maria said there is not much

known about Lauren's condition, and that she and her husband focus on one day at a time.

"We don't know what's going to happen," she said, honestly.

At 10 years old, Lauren stands nearly a foot shorter than her 11-year-old "buddy" Morgan Sullivan, of Forty Fort, but her demean-

nor speaks otherwise.

She's front-and-center of the 16-member team during the cheer routine and high above the group during the finale.

"She loves to dance and cheer," her mother said.

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