

UNH Integrates Nationally Recognized Anti-Bullying Program into Graduate Education Program

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Educators and students discuss how the Courage to Care program has helped their schools increase civility and empathy, which has been shown to reduce bullying.

In the United States, it is estimated that a child is bullied every seven minutes.

Now, future teachers graduating from the University of New Hampshire's graduate education program will enter their first classrooms better prepared to prevent bullying by focusing on creating civility and empathy. This spring, UNH is offering the new course "The Courage to Care: Teaching Empathy in the Classroom," which is based on the university's nationally recognized anti-bullying program for middle schools.

"After many years of research, we have learned that bullying in our schools and our society is a much more damaging and dangerous experience for children than we ever suspected. Unfortunately, it's much more widespread and is occurring at an earlier age than ever before," says Malcolm Smith, UNH Cooperative Extension professor and an affiliate professor of education, who will co-teach the new course.

The new course will provide future teachers intensive training in the Courage to Care program. After learning about how the curriculum helps alter a learning environment's culture and climate, students will implement the Courage to Care curriculum in a school, after-school, or other formal youth educational setting.

“Courage to Care focuses on what precedes bullying, and that is a loss of civility and empathy. Research shows we can reduce bullying and peer victimization by teaching our children to be more civil and empathetic with each other. We have found empathy does increase when the Courage to Care system is implemented in the school system,” said Patrick Shannon, Courage to Care project evaluator and associate professor of social work.

Created by researchers, educators and specialists at UNH, the Courage to Care is an evidence-based curriculum for middle school students, designed to increase empathy and care for others, and reduce bullying and meanness. It has been shown to be extremely effective in tests with more than 600 students to improve school culture and climate while reducing peer victimization. It is now used in more than 60 schools nationwide.

Rochester Middle School implemented the Courage to Care curriculum in 2013. “It gave us an opportunity to have really frank discussions with our sixth-graders about what it means to be caring and how to be safe,” said Valerie McKenney, principal of Rochester Middle school.

Great Bay Charter School Dean of Students Erick Feldborg said not only is the content in the Courage to Care curriculum solid, but the activities that students engage in achieve the program goals. “In not only talking about empathy, but in the act of talking about it and listening to each other’s experiences, kids are absorbing what it means to be empathetic. On multiple levels, the program hits it out of the park,” Feldborg said.

“The Courage to Care program helped the kids feel like they really had a voice that they didn’t have before. One of the comments they had about the program was that they enjoyed being able to just sit and talk and have a conversation and listen to each other,” said Annie Bourque, a teacher at Barnstead Middle School.

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Bourque said the program has helped students take more control of their lives and make better decisions, even when they are bullied.

Raleigh Casey, a Rochester Middle School student, was bullied after her school implemented the program. After seeking help, she said she realized that the students bullying her just wanted social power, and once they realized that other students would defend her, they stopped bullying her. “I learned that I didn’t want to make it such a big deal. I wanted to take it the right way and be able to settle it,” Casey said.

For more information on the Courage to Care curriculum, visit <http://courage2care.net/>.

For educators interested in learning more about the program, UNH is hosting a three-day leadership institute Feb. 12-14, 2014, at the UNH Browne Center in Durham. To register, visit <http://courage2care.net/upcoming-dates/>.

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