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P-O link with group aims for good behavior

Programs for students, community to look at bullying, drinking

By Dena Pauling

PHILIPSBURG — Philipsburg-Osceola Area School District is now part of a Centre County organization aimed at reducing high-risk behaviors among children and teens.

An agreement between the district and Centre County Communities that Care that will pave the way for more grant-funded, research-based programs within district schools was approved Tuesday by the school board.

“This is a great opportunity,” Superintendent Charles Young said. “They run a number of programs that I think we can take advantage of.”

The first on the list will kick off today, community mobilizer Kimberly Cassidy said in an interview Wednesday.

Cassidy will submit an application for a four-year state grant of up to \$700,000 to begin the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program at the P-O junior high school and at one elementary school next school year. If approved, the district’s other two elementary schools would take part the following year.

The anti-bullying program is named after its founder Dan Olweus, a professor of psychology at the University of Bergen in Norway. Students who live in the Clearfield County side of the district would also be eligible to participate.

“It’s a program that is offered during the school day to students,” Cassidy said. “If they go to that school, they would be impacted by the program.”

Communities that Care operates programs in Bald Eagle, Bellefonte and Penns Valley schools, she said, and has received \$2.4 million in grant funding since 2001.

The organization routinely conducts youth surveys that show the prevalence of risk behaviors, including substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, violence, depression and drop-out rates, in each district.

“Our mission really is to look at some of the risks that local youth face and identify programs that will help reduce those risks,” Cassidy said.

State College Area School District is part of the Centre Region CARE Partnership, which collaborates with Communities that Care.

One joint effort in the works is a town hall meeting about underage drinking at 7 p.m. April 1 at the Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology in Pleasant Gap. The second of the two-part series will explore healthy relationships for teens and address the issue of date rape. That session will be at 7 p.m. on April 15, also at CPI.

“Any community member is welcome to attend any community or outreach programming,” Cassidy said.

By partnering with Communities that Care, P-O is also committing to come to meetings and collaboratively work to “strengthen youth outreach in Philipsburg and within the county,” she said.

Kim Peters, P-O’s public relations and compliance officer, said she will serve as the district’s representative.

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