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Press Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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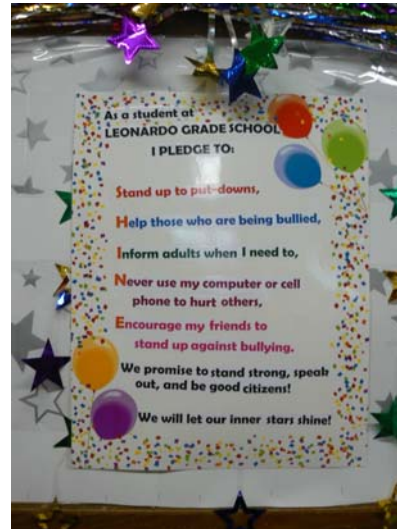
Leonardo School Fosters Tolerance and Understanding in “Stop the Bullying Day”

*Why do you hurt me, and treat me like you do?
What have I ever done to deserve this from you?
Would you do the things you do
If you were me and I were you?*

Chorus to Wanda’s Song, by The Reading Group, initiated in response to the book, Bullycide in America.

Middletown, NJ: Few things are more painful to a parent than to watch their child suffer when rejected by their peers, and in the process, ignored, teased and worse, bullied. Such behavior has plagued our school institutions from time immemorial. The severity of the problem was recently thrust into the national spotlight with the heartbreaking report of two “bullycides” (victim suicides attributed to depression from bullying) of eleven-year old boys. Recognizing that this problem existed in Leonardo School, as it does in most schools, fourth grade teacher Cheryl Cuddihy decided to do something about it. For the past several months, Mrs. Cuddihy has marshaled many district resources, including its behavioral specialist, student assistance counselors and guidance counselors to model programs for appropriate social skills in an attempt to build a classroom of support and mitigate negativity. Assisted by fourth grade teacher Kaitlin Healy and other staff members, Mrs. Cuddihy’s efforts culminated in an event held on May 1 entitled **Stop the Bullying Day** for the fourth and fifth grade students at Leonardo Grade School. The program utilized some suggested activities promoted by the **American Girl Stop the Bullying Day**, which was held in school districts throughout the country on May 1st. The company provided the school with online resources, bracelets, pledge cards and a banner.

Student activities during the day consisted of friendship fitness activities on the playground including an exercise where students worked together to untwist a human knot. The students had to build trust with one another so they could comfortably extricate themselves from the knot without hurting one another. In an art activity, students created beaded bracelets, which spelled key words that came up during thought provoking discussions--words like generosity, love, peace and understanding. They took turns in role playing sequences where they assumed the part of the bully, the victim, and the bystander. They learned that just as bad as the bully, is the bystander who does nothing to stop the abuse. The children explored the differences between tattling and telling with their teachers and how to feel empathy and look at situations from another person’s perspective. They were encouraged to consult knowledgeable adults in times of stress and anxiety.



Students at the Leonardo Grade School recently signed this pledge to combat bullying in their school during the first **Stop the Bullying Day** which was held on May 1.

Toward the end of the day, they viewed and discussed the movie, *Chrissa Takes a Stand*, an *American Girl* movie about a victim of bullying who then takes a stand against it. In a final meeting in the auditorium with all classes, the children verbalized what they were personally going to do to prevent bullying in their day-to-day lives. One young lady suggested that she would make an effort to go over and talk to anyone she saw alone on the playground. Another offered the statement, "I will not be a victim because if you eliminate the victim, you eliminate the bully." All the fourth and fifth graders then signed a pledge which hangs in the Leonardo entranceway affirming their resolve.

Mrs. Cuddihy comments, "I feel this day was a success, as it served as a culminating activity for our own classroom initiatives regarding social cruelty. I was pleased to see the message was also received by the more aggressive kids who engage in bullying. One fifth grade student was surprised to learn the legal consequences for aggressive behaviors and responded that, 'He better get his act together.' That was a profound moment during the day."

Winnie Supple, a special education teacher at Leonardo observed, "I think that kids who may engage in bullying don't realize that is what they are doing. Somewhere along the line they learned this was acceptable behavior and propagate a vicious cycle. I believe that inside every bully is a nice person; it's all about education to learn a better way to behave."

Parent Judy Saydah viewed the day's activities from a very specific perspective, as her child was victimized by bullying.

She remarked, "Sometimes I think that children think their classmate is part of a joke not realizing that they have actually made that child the joke. Mrs. Cuddihy has been working with the children since January, and I have seen a definite change in them. I am amazed and could not be more pleased with today's program. The children learned a lot about empathy and respect for others. It was a real eye opener."

Cheryl Cuddihy explains that she has modeled her classroom on the suggestions offered by the Character Education Partnership, a national umbrella organization committed to integrating character education in the classroom. It encourages teaching empathy by: fostering pro-social behaviors, creating a responsive classroom, coordinating shared experiences to develop empathy, utilizing positive discipline practices and committing school resources. All of which have already yielded positive results.

She states, "Leonardo Grade School is not alone in combating social cruelty issues. As a school house we united our resources, knowledge, and energy to create a shared experience during which we could emotionally invest in each one of our students so that they could learn to stand strong and combat social cruelty in our society. Going forward, as an educator, parent and resident of the district, I would like to see our district formally adopt and mandate a district wide character education program to further ethical, responsible and caring young people."

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Leonardo fourth grade teacher, Cheryl Cuddihy addresses the school's fourth and fifth grade students on ways to combat bullying during a special *Stop the Bullying Day* held at the school on May 1st.

Fifth graders display their special bead bracelets, which they made during an art activity at *Stop the Bullying Day* at

Leonardo Grade School. The children's bracelets spelled words such as generosity, peace, love and understanding, keywords they discussed throughout the day to combat bullying."





Leonardo students read their pledges on how they will personally stop bullying in their school and in any environment where they interact with other children.

Here students at Leonardo school take turns signing their pledge at **Stop the Bullying Day**, which states, "I pledge to

Stand-up to put downs,
Help those that are being bullied;
Inform adults when I need to;
Never use my cell phone or computer to hurt others;
Encourage my friends to stand up to bullies;

We promise to stand strong, speak out and be good citizens.

We will let our inner stars **SHINE!**

