

R-e-s-p-e-c-t, find out what it means to them

JESSICA SELBY

jsselby@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — Did you know that there is an imaginary wall that exists between certain groups of kids at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry?

According to the organizers of a program known as RESPECT, Change Begins Today, these walls are not isolated to the Coventry middle school. In fact, the organizers said, these walls are common in the majority of middle and high schools around the state.

But there was an event held at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry on Tuesday that brought students, faculty, administrators, local police officers and state employees together geared at breaking down that imaginary wall.

Ten students randomly selected from each team within the school were selected and the invitation went out to all of the faculty and administration in the school to participate. Close to a dozen responded. An invitation also went out to other local and state-wide professionals and a handful of those responded as well.

In the end just under 100 people were present at the first ever RESPECT, Change Begins Today event held at the school on Tuesday. Charles Blanchette, the coordinator of the S.A.V.E. (Students Against Vandalism Everywhere) program at the school, was the lead force in bringing the program to the school.

He said he serves on a board with Don Miller, the vice principal at Pilgrim High School, from which he learned about this RESPECT program. Blanchette said RESPECT is a program that was constructed based on the beliefs and works of Challenge Day, a program that has existed since 1987 and has touched the lives of over half-a-million teens and adults nationwide. The Challenge Day program, he said, has received numerous awards from the juvenile justice system, government officials and many school districts and cities throughout the nation, but is quite costly to bring to local schools.

The overall goals of the program are to increase personal power and self esteem, to shift dangerous peer pressure to positive peer support and to eliminate the acceptability of teasing, violence and all forms of oppression.



Sean Roles, eighth grader at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry, and Don Miller, vice principal at Pilgrim and one of the presenters of the school's first RESPECT event, demonstrate appropriate and inappropriate hugging during the seminar Tuesday.

Jessica Selby • Daily Times

The program was, however, brought to Pilgrim High School, where Miller and others from that school were fortunate enough to receive the educational training delivered through the program and have since created a program of their own based on the Challenge Day ideals.

Their program, which they named RESPECT, is described as "a powerful, high-energy program in which youth and adult participants are guided through a series of experiential learning processes." Blanchette said the overall goals of the program are to increase personal power and self esteem, to shift dangerous peer pressure to positive peer support and to eliminate the acceptability of teasing, violence and all forms of oppression.

The RESPECT Program, he said, "was designed to unite the members of the school or

community and to empower them to carry the themes of the program back to the school population." RESPECT, he said, "also successfully addresses issues of bullying, violence, teasing, social oppression, racism, harassment, conflict management, suicide, peer pressure, alcohol and drugs."

"Ultimately we deal with personalization," said Kelly Harrington, a Spanish teacher from Pilgrim High School who helped Don Miller lead the program at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry. "Our goal is to break down those barriers that exist so that no one in a school community, despite how many kids are actually there, feels alone."

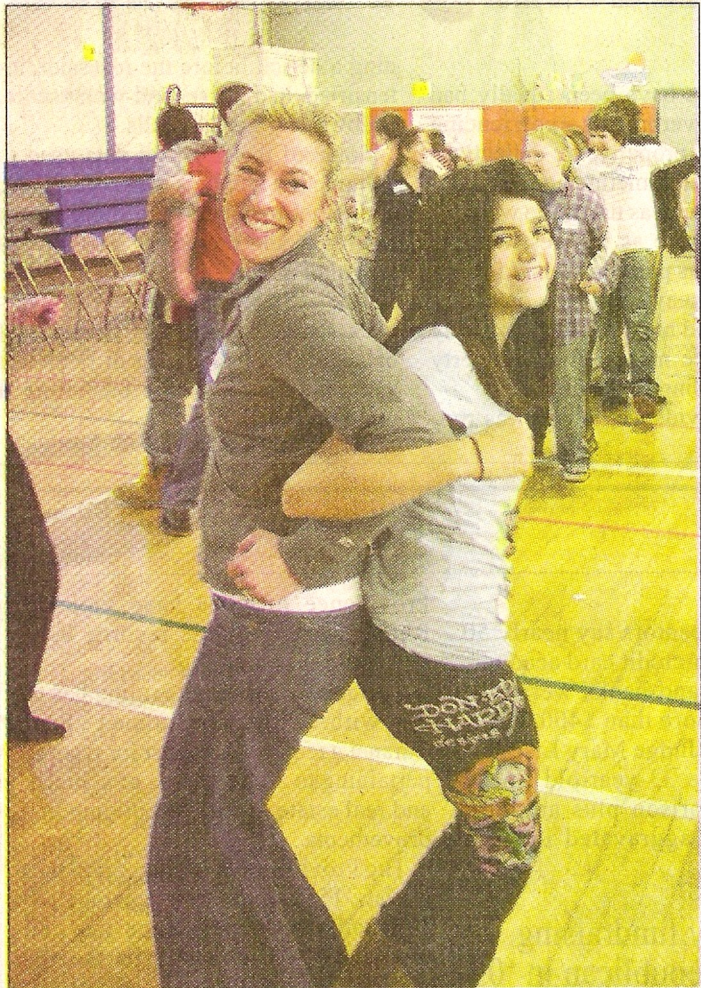
"We want to help kids to make a connection and realize that there is at least one person that

they can feel that they can go to in their school and feel comfortable doing so," she said. "We teach them that if they just give someone 60 seconds, and that is all that we give them as part of our program, 60 seconds, they might actually have a lot more in common with that person than they think that they do and it might even be with people that they would not at first expect."

Based on that theme, Blanchette said that is why he asked teachers in the school to select a broad base of students to participate in the event.

"We wanted to get a real cross section of the school so that every group was represented," he said. "I asked teachers to pick athletes, geeks and the stand-offish kids because we wanted to get

.....
See PROGRAM, Page A-3



Jessica Selby • Daily Times

Elizabeth Tattrie, a math teacher at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry, and Alison Levesque, a seventh grader at the school, participate in the RESPECT, Change Begins Today seminar Tuesday.

Program highlights students' sameness

Continued from Page A-1

.....
them all in here to participate in these activities with the adults and we have just as broad a base of adults; we have teachers, people from the AG's office, the department of education, local administrators and elsewhere so that they could participate in the various activities to help break down the barriers that have been built up between these groups so that the students could see how much we all actually have in common."

The program, although much more inexpensive than the Challenge Day program, still had a fee associated with it and was paid for through a grant

from the Randolph Savings Bank. Blanchette said "Peter Pastore Charitable Foundation is underwriting the costs for this exceptional, worthwhile and student-centered program."

During the program the participants played games like musical chairs, spoke vocally about respect, learned about the appropriate and inappropriate level of affection through the form of hugging and revealed their most embarrassing moments to each other.

They learned that touching each other in appropriate ways is acceptable behavior and that commonalities actually exist between people who at first may seem very different.