

perspective. While the teachers were not surprised to find that most of the violent behavior takes place on the playground, they were amazed to see how much bullying students say takes place in the classroom while the teacher is present! So the effort continues.

In mid-January, all the students will participate in one of three age-appropriate Beacon Street "We First" programs. Teachers have already received the order of events with clearly stated goals and objectives.

As a follow-up, students will be encouraged to "plaster the walls" with helpful and engaging words and phrases and images from their program. After a week or two, they will then be asked: "Which words work for you?" Those will endure as key components of the Bully Prevention program at UCS.

Teachers will guide the students to make sure they include reminders that address speech, actions, and attitudes. And they will remind the students that the success of the program rests on their shoulders. After all, there are 450 of them in the school, and just a handful of teachers. Successful strategies already in place at UCS will be left in tact. If it's not broke, they won't fix it!

Successes and shortfalls will be monitored during weekly homeroom meetings, a forum for feedback and encouragement. Leadership for this segment of the agenda will be rotated among every student in the room. The teachers hope this will not only reduce the risk of prejudice but surface a few new leaders as well.

Repeated shortfalls call for alternative measures. UCS is not a "no tolerance" school. Offenders will not be shown the door; they will be required to explore a new approach. Since bullying is a learned behavior, negative energies can be examined, evaluated, and re-directed. Students and teachers will have to sort out this facet of the program and construct a "re-habit" component for repeat offenders. New habits will be the fruit and a whole school will support renewed efforts.

Urban Community School is among the first to engage our "We First" offering. And since "We" means everyone, every teacher has signed on and every child will be reminded that, not only is

bullying inappropriate, but every student will be expected to address demeaning behavior when and where they see it. Everyone must be willing to be the change they wish to see.

When bullying takes place, most of the players are bystanders. Nearly all of them recognize bullying for what it is and readily admit they don't think it belongs in the school. But very few are willing to step in and intervene. This phenomenon is not generic to schools only.

In the book *Tipping Point*, the author Malcolm Gladwell points out that the larger the group of witnesses, the more personal responsibility is dispersed! We've all seen it. Isolated individuals are more likely to step up than the group as a whole. We may have experienced this once ourselves. "We First" challenges the norm.

**"This is Holy Ground,"
principal Pam Delly
said, "because of
who come through
these doors
every day."**

"We First" is based on the premise that upholding the school mission is a shared responsibility. And while someone has to be the first to stop the incident, everyone else must pledge to be right behind. Indeed, many admit they would be more willing to be the first if they were assured the rest of the bystanders would be half a step away. And many bystanders, already

inclined to help, would be part of a peaceful intervention as long as they didn't have to be first!

What the students and staff at UCS are relying on is what all of us need - just enough courage to get moving in the right direction. Come Holy Spirit!

To the degree that "We First" and the anti-bullying efforts are successful, UCS will more and more become a place where it is easier to teach, more affirming to be oneself, and more conducive to building the kind of character that the Near West Side needs. And everywhere else, for that matter.

