

Scotia-Glenville Central School District: Community Forum re. Bullying, Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016, 7 p.m.

Notes prepared by Heather Nellis, public information specialist, Capital Region BOCES Communication Service

Affiliation	Comments
Superintendent	<p>The superintendent introduced herself and welcomed guests. She told attendees that when she is on her way to school, she thinks about children. She hopes they got a good night's sleep, ate a good breakfast and had a safe way to school. She said most of all, she hopes students find their school to be a warm and welcoming place that is safe & secure, and that they feel part of a larger group that is accepting and kind. She said she knows they fall short of that goal, and apologized, but that she can't do it alone, and that it will take the entire community. She apologized again to guests who may feel distressed, and said her hope was to address and fix concerns to the greatest extent possible. She noted she would be unable to discuss individual students, staff members or circumstances due to privacy laws and her own morals and ethics, but said she is available by appointment both at school and off-site.</p> <p>The superintendent referenced a brief presentation about the district's anti-bullying programs and disciplinary process, defined the difference between bullying and being mean, and talked about progressive discipline. She talked about student expulsion and said her last desire is to throw students out of school. She talked about the disciplinary timeline, including investigation, hearing, mediation and counseling. She said the district works to tailor the mediation process to students' individual needs in accordance with the law. She said if students pose a danger, an alternate location will be found for them, but it is still her last desire to throw students out of school, both on a legal and ethical basis.</p>
Parent	<p>The parent thanked the district for holding the meeting, and said she believes the district is doing all it can to address bullying. She asked parents to consider the possibility that all children have it in them to be bullies, and said she has been on both sides of the issue herself. She said a solution can be found if parents work with the school. She suggested increased attendance at meetings, alternative programs, and a resource officer.</p>
Parent/employee	<p>The parent said kids aren't perfect and can make bad choices, but are still amazing individuals. She said parents should take responsibility for their children's actions, and suggested increased parent involvement.</p>
Parent	<p>The parent said her child is biracial and was bullied from 7th to 9th grade, and discussed several instances. She said bullying affects everyone in the family, and her child lost interest in academics and athletics. She said she struggles to get him to graduate, and he doesn't care about anything, including himself. She said students need someone to go to; they need a safe haven. She said her son received support from a former teacher, but asked the superintendent what she should do.</p>
Superintendent	<p>The superintendent said as soon as bullying is recognized, parents can reach out to teachers, school counselors, and administrators, but recognized that hasn't worked in certain instances.</p>
Alumna	<p>A Class of 2016 graduate said she witnessed an instance of bullying in the high school</p>

	<p>courtyard in which an underclassmen was reading alone during lunch in the school courtyard. She said an upperclass student was yelling curse words and insults outside a window at the underclassman. She said she spoke out against the bully and approached the underclassman, who told her that happens to him every day. She said she gave the information to the main office, but was unsure if anything happened afterward. She urged fellow students to say something if they see anything like that happen, and to stand up for their peers who are being bullied. She said it can be reported anonymously.</p>
Parent	<p>A parent said his eldest child was bullied, and has been hospitalized because she was unable to cope. While he gave credit to an administrator for trying to help, he said teachers can't be counselors. He said parents should utilize the police and be vigilant to address instances of bullying.</p>
Parent	<p>A parent said her son is bullied because he is short. She said the school is doing everything it can, but the discipline is not working. She said different consequences besides expulsion and suspension are needed to make the discipline productive and lead students to make better choices. She said students also need to teach empathy and lead by example, particularly on Facebook.</p>
Parent	<p>A parent said she works with kids and said they have to be taught they are all friends and part of a team. She said she witnessed an instance of bullying and saw classmates band together to protect the young victim. She said adults need to teach kids that it is ok to speak out. She said the district should establish a group and space for kids to go to. She said her foster child is bullied and that it hasn't been stopped.</p>
Alumna	<p>An alum said she is not a parent but wanted to get involved. She said kids have to be educated about the impacts of social media. She said it allows bullying to follow kids home.</p>
Student	<p>A student said she has never been bullied but has seen it. She said people need to understand and empathize with both sides. She said all students need to know they can call someone when they need help.</p>
Grandparent	<p>A grandparent said she was disappointed with the turnout at the forum. She said kids are afraid to approach adults and believe it is squealing when they tell people what is happening.</p>
Parent	<p>A parent said she thinks the community as a whole is lacking in support and respect for each other. She said she is a transplant in the community. She said bullying affects everyone, from kids to adults, from student athletes to kids in the drama club. She said she contacted international anti-bullying organizations and requested materials. She envisions creating a support group, and suggested mandatory participation by all students. She said students could support each other in various ways, like walking each other to the principal's office if they need help. She said adults need to treat each other better, too. She talked about the emergence of technology and social media, and how life is different for kids now compared to past generations. She suggested the school present motivational guest speakers and hiring a school resource officer. She said parents can start a petition to show their support of a resource officer position.</p>
Parent	<p>A parent said he works for the NYS court system, and has watched teenagers go to state prison for felonies. He talked about his own experiences being bullied in high school, and how kids face pressure and deal with broken homes. He said discipline is needed in family households, and that the court system, police and school need to come together to address</p>

	the issue. He said parents need to do more to back up school discipline, and if a student breaks the law at school, he believes they should be arrested at school in front of their peers.
Parent	A parent shared her experiences of bullying when she was young and said she attempted suicide. She said her daughter is in elementary school and hasn't been bullied, but she knows how it feels. She said kids need to know they're watching out for them. She suggested creating a program to better link parents. She said kids may act differently if other adults know kids' parents. She said bullies need to be considered and empathized with, because there is a reason for their behavior. She said they may have bad circumstances at home, or may have suffered a loss or another situation that causes them to act out.
Parent	A parent said the district should establish study circles so kids can talk about their differences and why they bully each other. She said the program should be led by someone who is trained to lead study circles.
Parent	A parent said all parents should learn about social media, not just the platforms parents use, like Facebook. She said parents need to engage in all social media platforms that their children are using.
Parent	A parent said her son was slapped but did not defend himself because kids don't want to get in trouble at school by retaliating. She said kids and their parents should be held responsible for bullying. She suggested the school welcome a guest speaker.
Alumnus & parent	An alum and parent said anonymity can breed anti-social behavior. He encouraged parents to get involved and said some parents may not know how their kids are behaving online.
Parent	A parent asked if there is wiggle room in the zero tolerance policy. Administrators said yes. The parent said it is unfair when students are disciplined for fighting back. She said kids don't say anything because they don't feel like anything will be done about it.
Parent	A parent said her son is an easy target for bullying. She said he engaged in a fight when he saw another student being bullied. She said schools need to have rules, and he accepted his punishment but she took him out to celebrate after. She said parents need to decide when they get home if the action is worth the consequence.
Parent	A parent questioned why their child should receive the same punishment if they were defending themselves. They said kids should be able to defend themselves.
School board member and parent	A school board member and parent said he doesn't believe in violence. He said he did not want to criticize the people who did not attend the forum, and instead wanted to thank those who did attend.
Parent	A parent said kids should use social media as a tool to catch bullies in the act.
Parent	A parent said programs like D.A.R.E. are a means to help kids and police become friends. He said a resource officer could help be a friend and go-to for kids. He said police presence could help curb bullying.
Parent	A parent said his children have been bullies and have been bullied. He said the school does what it can to help but it is tied by laws. He said he has brought bullying to the school's attention, and sometimes they have told him about bullying he didn't know about. He said

	some parents don't have someone to watch their kids, or work two jobs or double shifts. He said maybe some parents don't know their kids are bullies. He said everyone needs to work together to get the message out about the problem.
Parent	A parent suggested creating a remediation program like one that exists at Schenectady, and suggested exploring available resources from the county. The parent said parents of bullies should be held accountable.
Parent	A parent questioned how others found out about the meeting. Other parents told her how to find the event online, and suggested they start using social media.
Parent and student	A parent asked her daughter to talk about about instances of bullying she has seen. The daughter said the bullying doesn't happen at school or extracurricular activities, rather at home on social media. The parent said it is important to keep programs and activities in the budget to give kids something to do.
Parent	A parent suggested holding a community forum about making a bullying law. He suggested inviting the local police chief.
Parent	A parent said his son used to be bullied, but it stopped when his peers got to know him by playing on the basketball team.
Parent	A parent asked what happens when bullying is caught in the act?
Superintendent	The superintendent said mediation and punishment, depending on the situation. She said the district doesn't have as many tools as it could.
Parent	A parent said bullies should be forced to publicly apologize in front of their peers.
Superintendent	The superintendent thanked guests for their comments. She said she knows it was hard to hear, but that the school shares their concerns. She said they want to work and partner with them to address it. She said to kids, it doesn't matter if it's bullying or if it's mean, it just hurts. She said the comments will be posted online and the district will keep everyone informed of next steps.

Comments from Dec. 15 Scotia-Glenville community forum

Notes prepared by Nanette Blake, public information specialist, Capital Region BOCES Communication Service

Parent - I came here tonight to represent and support other parents with concerns happening in the high school. I didn't know there was as much bullying as there is. My student was lucky and didn't face it. We are a small district. A lot of students are like family. After the tragedy recently I thought there should have been more done. I never heard anything about grief counselors being brought in. Students were dealing with the situation at home. They were left alone to process it. They should never have to process it alone. There should be more of an understanding from teachers. Some of the teachers apparently basically said suck it up, you have a test to take. Some teachers were not like that. They let students leave the room if they couldn't handle the test. Why hasn't there been an assembly with someone in the psychological/ psychiatry realm as to what kids can do if they feel alone and unhappy? They are still kids. I feel the district dropped the ball as a small community. The best way to build a community is to do things together. I was disappointed in that. It didn't happen.

Parent – I'm here to represent Elis Hospital. I am part of the suicide/high risk task force. The number children that have been coming through is sad. Ever since the child's death, we've been seeing a greater number. They need a lot of assistance. And there is a lot of assistance out there. They need more education on how to cope and how to talk to their parents. And parents need to know how to talk to your children. The word suicide is scary. I'm here as a resource. I am happy to speak to anyone. I agree that as a small community, we really need to come together.

Parent – There was a lack of real response to what happened a couple of weeks ago. It's important that we do look into community outreach and do a better job at helping these kids. I didn't see the bullying with my first two kids. We need to do a better job dealing with this issue. I don't know if there is more aggression now, but it's different with these kids. My third one is dealing with it. The district as a whole needs to work harder to make it easier for these kids. Just my being here is an indication it has gone too far. I'd like it to be that my kid goes to school and it's seamless.

Student – I was friends with Luke. It's still really hard. Going through this is the hardest thing's I'll ever go through. He was too young. The hardest part of losing him was seeing his mom at the funeral or seeing friends at school. I didn't really talk about it, but I wish I did. I've been writing a letter to him about what I thought was going on. He was always happy and making everyone else smile and making me laugh. I don't know how to grieve and I was there was something going on at school Watching a movie didn't help. It was just one day. None of us will ever get over it. I'm still grieving inside. I miss him constantly and I'm dealing with it well.

Parent – (to student) Thank you for your bravery for coming here and saying that. Could the district speak to the length of time it takes to address a bullying issue? We see what happens to an aggressor but what about the one being bullied. When it happened to my kid, the kids were basically put in a room together and they had to sign a contract that essentially said they would stay away from each other. This basically made it my son's responsibility. It took two and a half years to resolve. When the issue was addressed – when the other student got the proper help – he was able to turn things around. I don't think most people bully just to bully. That's two and a

half years of his life wasted when he didn't get the help he needed. It was also two and a half years of my son being bullied. And it wasn't being mean; it was "I'm going to kill you" every day.

Parent – What now? What do we do now? Bullying is really everyone's responsibility. What are the resources that we can put in place for everybody whose responsibility it is – as parents, as a school? If someone is being a bully or if someone is seeing bullying? We need to equip our kids to be aware. They are all about themselves. We need to them to see those around them, to have a global concern about their school. How can they engage in a proactive, purposeful way every day? How do we equip our teachers? With what resources? It's everyone's situation and responsibility. It impacts everyone. We need to put things into place to engage during a situation, not after. We need to make sure we are a safe haven for our kids. It doesn't matter where they come from. How do we put stuff into place purposefully to make sure this doesn't happen? How about kids with no confidence and are devastated because of the jackass who makes comments every day? We need to change that. Make them think about each other. How can I add value to you? We have to do this everyday. We need to put resources in place for it.

Parent – Thank you for having this in a short fashion. It does take a village to raise a child, not just a mom and dad or grandparents or aunt or uncle or whatever someone's family looks like. It takes a community. As president of the Babe Ruth baseball, I see these kids. I see their struggles at school. I also see them leave that behind and smile and play baseball. But I also so the hurt that follows them that they can't let go. That feeling that they are never good enough. Over the years, I've seen attendance decline to the point Babe Ruth may not exist. Where's the support from parents? I see cars drop off kids. I see one coach. Parents don't spend enough time with kids. Yes, I realize we all have jobs, some have two or three. But time is what these kids need. Children saw a lot during the election. Not to get political, but it was one big bullying scene. Kids didn't know how to cope with it. We're talking ages 6-18. They are looking to parents and teachers as role models. Everyone is scared – teachers, parents. Kids see it in our faces. We need to be strong for these kids. We need a landing spot when they get out of here (school). Some don't have that. Some are home alone. Some are in bad situations. We talk about suicide. As soon as you put something in your mouth or blood, you are taking your life. As a community we need to ban together and find a place for them. They need a lot of social interaction. And we need more interaction with these kids as parents and leaders.

Parent – All this stuff scares the crap out of me. Bullying is not a new thing. I listened to a lot of people taking yesterday. Everyone has the capacity to bully or be mean to everyone. Social media – there is nothing we can do about it. We talk about burning the interwebs, but it's not possible. It makes it a lot harder for kids to get away from bullying. Life is really tough for kids. It's really tough for me to talk about. I went to Scotia and when I was in school, I had a good social circle. Luckily I had friends that were similar. This is cumulative. This stuff has happened over and over. All my parents what to school and had kids at the same time and now my friends are. I don't know if there is a magic answer but there has to be more involvement. I probably bullied a few people in school and I also kicked the crap out of a few bullies. It was probably not the right thing to do but it was in my mind. We need to figure out the right thing to do. Everyone is busy; some of us have multiple jobs, some are single parents, etc. We need to stop blaming people and take that energy and put it toward the kids.

Parent – I heard a lot of people talk about community and that we need to pull together. I understand a lot of people have busy lives. I even told my kid and her friends they should come tonight. It's the same. All the parents that want to say something are here. I just to go to all the teen towns.

It was always the same parents. Where are the others? Not all those parents work 2-3 jobs. I know that's an issue for some and we can't fix that, but what about the others? I really hope the school would make kids participate in an open forum in a small group forum so everyone did it so no one feels weird about doing it. I think parents do need to help. There are some involved and some who can't and some who don't. Bullies usually have something going on at home. That contract (another parent spoke of) is ridiculous. That's not going to stop it any more than an order of protection against an abusive boyfriend would prevent him from murdering me a week later. But if you spend time with a bully or a school psychologist works with him, maybe you can get to the root of why he's doing it. It shouldn't be you stay on your side of the room. I think all of us here want to help, but it's a small group – no doubt about it. I had heard from my child that she knows of at least two children in the last year that voiced an opinion about killing themselves. She doesn't know what to do about it. She thinks one is for show and one is someone who goes home and plays Xbox and has no life outside of school. I hate to think of the situation that occurred recently and how it impacted those kids thinking about suicided. They see and think they'll have a funeral and everyone will come and everyone will cry for me. It scares them. It makes them angry. We are all here for the same reason, but where is everyone else? Where are the teachers to hear this? It's hard to stop bullying. I'm in my 50s and I was bullied. Give them tools to deal with it and let them know they are not alone.

Parent – What I've learned about kids is they are amazing and very good problem solvers. Some nights there are 15 of them at my house. And if you just sit back and listen to them, it's amazing. Give them a chance to be together and they really know how to support each other. Give them a place for that. Tell them it's okay to get in the way of a bully. It's okay to talk to people and let them know they are doing something wrong. The kids have to be the ones to fix it. We can give them the tools and support, but they are the only ones who can fix it.

Student – I was bullied when I came through middle school. I am probably bullied today but I don't pay attention to it. I was bullied for a certain thing that happened in sixth grade, for my weight, for being in drama club, for the way I talk to people, for being too kind. I don't like seeing my friends be upset. I want to be the first person they come to when they are. But I don't want to go to anyone when I have a problem because it makes me feel weak. Losing my friend was hard. Speaking about my friend is hard. When he came to school, all of us friends would be upstairs in the sophomore hallway. Luke was not into being in big groups, unless it was with us. Once he was gone, everything was silent upstairs. When I got to my friend group, two big guys were hugging and crying and it had me sobbing. Luke also did drama club with me. He loved being back stage in the wings, see us and what we were doing and making us smile and laugh. I miss him greatly and I know it's not something people want to talk about. I tried to encourage my friends to come tonight but they are too stubborn. It's not easy watching someone get picked on and called names. Speak to your children. I didn't go to my parents about any of this until this year. Talk to your kids, please. It will help so much.

Parent – I'm in the middle of dealing with something like this with my high school student right now. She had been removed from school to recompose herself. She's been bullied for a year and not dealing with it. Everything came to head now, a year later and now my daughter needs to be removed. This needs to be addressed sooner and a more often. There was an assembly in middle school, but not at the high school. I am worried about kids going home alone because of their internal thoughts. The school needs to be on top of it. My student is not a fight back kid. She was high honors and had to remove herself from playing certain sports because of the people on those teams. Social media plays a part. Teach kids how to handle things. Talk to kids

to find out what's going on. My daughter is emotionally broken down. She has no confidence. She doesn't want to go to school anymore. She's high honor roll and I don't want to see that. She wanted a scholarship to college like her sister. To see another student possibly destroy another student's future...Everyone gets hung up about not wanting to share personal information and there is where I struggle. The classroom is where these kids spend a huge part of their day and yet teachers don't know what's going on because they might not be aware or told about a certain situation. It sounds like teachers don't know what to look out for. They can't separate the kids or cut something off at the pass. They need to know about situations so they can nip it in the bud and deal with the kid or send them to office or whatever. I'd love to see an assembly. We need to reiterate bullying is not going to be tolerated. We aren't going to put up with name calling, and having lunches smooched in people's faces. Out of school suspension is a vacation for them. Unfortunately we have to blame the parents. Some don't do anything. Though one did take the time to find out my information and come to me and say they removed the kid's phone and iPad and were trying to take away the Internet. I commend that parent for trying to do that. We need to have more control over our kids and what they are doing. We need to reiterate what's right and what they should be doing. Keep drilling it into their heads. Reiterate we are not going to take bullying. My kid came back to school and right away people were laughing at her. I told her the first day would be her worst. Just try the best way she can and if she can't do it, go to the office, talk to the principal or social worker and just get through the day. I like to see something held here about bullying once a month. Kids have thick heads and it bounces off them. The need repetition. We can't wait until a student threatens to take his life or until something bad happens for us to come together. If all this was address a year ago, maybe my child wouldn't be where she is now.

Parent – My son was in 11 grade until last week when I pulled him out and we went to another school. In middle school his cumulative GPA was 95+. It started slipping but we figured it was a new place. Something might not have been right since his GPA was in the 80s, but he was still doing good and trying out for sports. Then his freshmen year, it was 75. Sophomore year, 70. I was not as quick to act as I should have been. My son doesn't say anything. You could sit with him for 40 days and he wouldn't talk. There is something deep rooted in these kids that won't come out no matter what. We tried counseling. He wouldn't try out for certain teams because he knew some of the kids there would bully him. I won't advocate for my kid because I think I did what I need to for him. But he had a concussion and a note from a neurologist. The school has a plan: an advocate for the student, the nurse or doctor involved and representative of administration. Yet none of that really took place. He was just told make up all the back work. That's not what you do. Somewhere along the line something happened. He didn't tell me. He still won't tell me. I said he wasn't getting enough help. I was told quote unquote he is getting exactly what he deserves. Sensitivity training needs to be taken from A-Z. Teachers need to go back for classes, so does the administration. Bullies learn from bullies and if they see it from teachers or staff and it's accepted, I can't take that. Not my tax dollars. I'll go to the board and if they won't address it, we need to change the board. My apologies to those teachers who are trying. They are there. All I can say was there were warning signs all along. Teachers see him more than I do. They have more custody of my kid than I do. I feel we are missing the boat with warning signs on these kids. Every night, I go to bed and pray to god I know my kid. Teachers need to know our kids.