

Catholic school students help create new bullying-prevention Web site

ST. PAUL, Minn. - "Guess who just signed on?" a teenage girl says to a couple of her friends huddled around a computer monitor. "Sarah. You know, Sarah - sits in the back of science (class), never talks to anybody. You know, Miss Science Fair."

The girls all laugh.

"I hear that she has a thing for Dylan."

"Wait, Dylan the quarterback? Like that's going to happen."

"You guys, I think we should help her out," one girl says with a smirk. "You in?"

The girls proceed to set Sarah up, embarrassing her in front of her friends and Dylan while they are all attending a basketball game. Sarah is devastated.

This fictional scenario is one of several videos students from Convent of the Visitation School and St. Thomas Academy in Mendota Heights produced for the new Web site TeensAgainstBullying.org.

The Web site was created by the Minnesota Parent Training and Information Center, called the PACER Center. The Minneapolis-based nonprofit organization, which serves families of children with disabilities, seeks to educate teens about the damaging effects of bullying in all its forms as well as how to respond if they fall victim to a bully.

The videos produced by the students can be viewed on the Web site by clicking on "Respond" and then "Acting Up."

"We realized quickly that to make an impact we were going to need to really engage all kids to care about bullying and that it was going to be the peers themselves who could really make a difference in how children look at bullying situations," said Julie

Hertzog, the center's bullying-prevention project coordinator.

"We started by asking their opinions about things - (from) everything about bullying to current teen culture to how they use technology - because we wanted to make a product that was very relevant, very edgy and that definitely appealed to the teen audience," Hertzog told *The Catholic Spirit*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. "It's very much about teen power, teen voice and teens making a difference."

Wendy Short-Hays, head of VISTA Productions, the combined theater department of Visitation and St. Thomas, said she took on the project as a way to give students experience with video production as well as an opportunity to perform community service.

Over the past year, the students worked with Short-Hays and a professional videographer to write scripts, rehearse and film the videos.

"I think that every kid has some experience (with bullying). It's been something that I've dealt with most of my life," said Sarah Busch, a recent Convent of the Visitation graduate who worked on the project. "It was a really incredible experience to be able to take these feelings I have about bullying and my experiences and put them into a medium to help other people."

Busch, who plans to attend St. Olaf College in Northfield in the fall, said working with PACER employees stirred in her a passion for social work.

"It was really inspiring to see people who actually made a career out of helping kids and who have put so much time and energy into doing it, which is what I want to do," she said.