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Police, Schools Revamp Bullying Prevention

Project B.A.T.L.E. is being hailed as both an innovative and proactive approach to bullying.

By [Sean McCullen](#) | [Email the author](#) | October 4, 2011

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We want to know what you think about this new Gloucester Township Police Department anti-bullying initiative. [Tell us in the comments.](#)

The township's new Project B.A.T.L.E. anti-bullying initiative was hailed by Mayor David Mayer on Monday as one that "will be a statewide model for addressing this very serious issue in our communities."

"It is much different than when I went to school or perhaps when you went to school, when intimidation and bullying was something that happened on the playground," Mayer said. "Today, with the various means of communications, whether it's Facebook, Twitter or email, we have really opened the door much wider to the effects of bullying."

"And I think our children sometimes don't understand the significance of their actions. This program will help them do that."

A press conference touting Project B.A.T.L.E.'s imminent kickoff was held Monday afternoon at [Timber Creek Regional High School](#), bringing together police, school and government officials, and students.

"We've made a connection between bullying and crime, which is unique—I really believe so," [Gloucester Township Police](#) Chief W. Harry Earle said.

The police department developed the anti-bullying program, which includes both diversionary treatment programs for offenders and support programs for victims, over the past eight months. It will work with both public and private schools in the township to attempt to curb bullying and limit the societal damage the harassment and intimidation helps create.

Earle pointed to the very serious consequences of bullying for many victims, including alcohol and drug abuse, poor academic performance and absenteeism, premature sexual experiences, suicide, and violence.

"It's not teasing names on the playground," Earle said. "It's a whole new level that needs to be addressed, and that's what we're doing."

Project B.A.T.L.E. will utilize five strategy components:

- Information-sharing between law-enforcement and school officials
- Bullying awareness training for law enforcement (which parallels training now required of all school staff members in New Jersey)
- G.T. F.O.C.U.S., a diversionary program for juveniles who commit minor offenses linked, or possibly linked, to bullying
- The Gathering Space, a teen enrichment and support group that meets weekly
- Handshakes Not Handcuffs, a two-hour group program for juveniles less than 13 years old who have committed minor offenses linked, or possibly linked, to bullying

Earle commended two Timber Creek staff members—student assistance coordinator Donna Fonte and social worker Michele Selfridge—for their efforts on Project B.A.T.L.E., particularly the development of G.T. F.O.C.U.S., a program aiming to assist students ages 13 to 17 who have committed minor

offenses or whose parents contact police to get their children help.

G.T. F.O.C.U.S. consists of six, hour-and-a-half sessions held over a six-week period. The words behind the acronym explain each step to the program:

- G.T. - **G**etting to know each other
- F - **F**inding other choices
- O - **O**wning anger and other feelings
- C - **C**ommunicating within, around and about family
- U - **U**nderstanding drug abuse and addiction
- S - **S**ocial networking without consequences

The first G.T. F.O.C.U.S. session is scheduled to be held Nov. 2, Earle said.

Timber Creek student leaders Haley Washington and Jordan Crawley discussed The Gathering Space during Monday's press conference.

"We want everyone to feel like they have a safe place to discuss things like positive relationships, goal-setting, assertive communication, sexual harassment, addiction and dating violence," Washington said. "Our goal is for our members to meet new people, learn something and possibly help someone along the way."

In addition to a group setting, The Gathering Space drop-in center will also consist of one-on-one counseling with a social worker for students ages 13 to 18.

The group will meet Mondays from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at [Point Ariel Park](#) Community Building.

The first session of Handshakes Not Handcuffs is tentatively scheduled for Jan. 11.

In addition to the township's [K-8 district](#) and [Black Horse Pike Regional School District](#), Erial Christian Community School, [Our Lady of Hope Regional School](#), [Kingdom Charter School of Leadership](#) and [Camden County Technical Schools-Gloucester Township](#) will participate in Project B.A.T.L.E.

For more information on Project B.A.T.L.E., which is supported by Gloucester Township Municipal Alliance, contact the Enrichment Information Line at **856-374-5709** or send an email to enrichment@glotwp.com.

Editor's Note: CNN will air a special on bullying Sunday at 8 p.m.

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