

# District feels ripple effects of Williamsville student suicide

## Superintendent Christmann gets wave of calls by parents on bullying policy, cites enforcement

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The Grand Island School District, like schools across Western New York and the nation, is still feeling the ripple effects of the tragic bullying-related suicide of Jamey Rodemeyer last month in Williamsville.

Superintendent Robert Christmann told the School Board on Monday night that he has fielded a wave of calls from parents about the district's bullying policy since Rodemeyer's death Sept. 18.

While the district has always treated bullying seriously, Christmann said teachers and administrators have been reminded to be more sensitive to potentially threatening comments made in schools. The board also has a policy, and the district a code of conduct, concerning bullying. Both are rigorously enforced.

"I think we're going to do even more to be aware of what's being heard and what's being said," the superintendent said.

Perhaps due to heightened sensitivity to negative speech, more bullying-related referrals to principals have been made recently, Assistant Superintendent Karen Karmazin said. The district's anti-bullying committee also reconvened and is set to attend two bullying conferences in an effort to boost staff development on the matter, she said, adding that character enrichment is taught at all grade levels.

While school officials do their part, parents and students need to contribute to the effort to eradicate bullying, Christmann said.

“One of our frustrations is we can’t deal with something we don’t know about,” Christmann said.

“The issue is often with bystanders,” said Karmazin, who noted that too many people who know about bullying fail to follow through by alerting authorities. “That’s not tolerable.”

The highest frequency of bullying-related incidents is among ninth-grade girls, Christmann said. Eliminating negative habits at that age could lead to greater peace as the students get older, he said.

“Ninth-grade girls are sometimes very, very challenging, and they say things to other girls that are nasty,” he said. “If we can put an end to it there, it’ll have long-term effects.”

The board will take part in a special bullying workshop in November that should shed more light on the district’s efforts to combat bullies, which Karmazin said continue in full force.

While school officials re-examined their efforts to fight bullying in recent weeks, one district employee took a different route to make a difference. Kristine Bajdas, a library clerk in the high school, helped organize a “Put the Lid on Bullying” fundraiser that yielded more than \$2,000 in a single day. Those funds will be split among the teenager whose parents were killed last month in a car crash at the Cheeburger Cheeburger restaurant in Amherst, the University at Buffalo’s anti-bullying center and the charity being set up in Rodemeyer’s memory by his parents.