

PeaceBuilders aim to make school safer, more peaceful place to learn, grow

Written by Diane Schindwein



LEFT: **PeaceBuilders** trainer Kristi Kelly (standing to right of the classroom flip chart) talks to St. Agnes student council members about the damage unkind words can do to a young person's self-esteem. In this exercise, students were asked to say "something mean" to this paper cut-out "student" and then rip a piece of him away. Later they were asked to apologize and tape the student back together again. Kelly pointed out to the eighth-graders that once unkind words are uttered they can never totally be erased from a person's mind.

St. Agnes School in Springfield has become the first Illinois school outside Chicago to implement the **PeaceBuilders** program. Selected staff members, parents and eighth-grade student council members were trained in the program during the last week of October and are now teaching others about how to promote peaceful ways of solving conflicts, thereby avoiding aggression.

PeaceBuilders is a violence-prevention youth program approved for the federally funded Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act and is managed by **PeacePartners, Inc.**, which is based in California. It is a comprehensive community-based program that shifts the entire organizational climate to a peaceful, productive and safe place for children, parents and community.

In the school setting, **PeaceBuilders** increases academic achievement by allowing teachers to spend more time teaching and less time disciplining. It creates a peaceful environment by increasing positive, respectful, thoughtful behavior, while decreasing violence and disruptive behavior.

Kristi Kelly, a **PeaceBuilders** trainer for the last 10 years and a counselor at St. Mary Academy in Louisville, Ky., said she was pleased to be in Springfield to work with St. Agnes principal Sister Joan Sorge, OP, teachers, parents and students. "St. Agnes is a wonderful school already, but they wanted to be pro-active," she said. "However, if you create a more peaceful atmosphere you'll see more learning going on."

Eighth-grade student council member Andrea Jachino was one of the first students trained in the program. "I'm excited for **PeaceBuilders** to work and to begin to have more peace in the school," she said.

"I think everybody knows bullying is wrong," said fellow eighth-grader and student council member Megan O'Brien. "It is just a matter of spreading a message of peace."

"I am proud that St. Agnes was the first in the diocese to implement this program," Sister Joan said. "I encourage others to join us in becoming **PeaceBuilders**."