



## Superintendent's Column

One of the highlights leading up to Red Ribbon Week is a Joint Munsey Park/Shelter Rock SCA meeting which is focused on a nationally acclaimed bullying prevention program called "Box Out Bullying." To help accommodate busy parent schedules, two meetings will be held on Thursday, October 8: a morning meeting beginning at 9:30 at Munsey Park and an evening meeting beginning at 7:30 at Shelter Rock. The target audience for these two meetings are parents of students in grades K -6. This topic is quite pertinent as some children in our society are verbally abused by their peers in ways that are as painful to those physically bullied as to those who are simply left out of friend groups by their classmates.

During the summer I wrote a letter to the Manhasset staff that contained the following relevant personal story:

On the first weekend in August, my wife, Debbie, and I were minding our three grandchildren as our son, Craig, and his wife, Krystal, were attending an out of state wedding. On this hot Saturday afternoon, two close friends, who are now both grandmothers, also happened to be watching their grandchildren. Before we knew it, seven children, ranging in ages from six months (Madison) to thirteen years, were in the pool at our house; it was a scene reminiscent of the old days at the Cardillo household, of summers when our six sons spent countless hours swimming and playing together. In watching these youngsters, I felt a measure of nostalgia; for me it was a throwback Saturday with young children having carefree fun, laughing and splashing around with one another, playing pool volleyball, tipping one another off floats and swimming. (Note: Madison was in the pool in a tube float with her grandfather successfully shielding her from any large waves of water coming in her direction.)

When I finally got out of the pool, several of the kids remained splashing in the water. Watching them, I began to think about each of these seven children, wondering (unrealistically, I know) why we can't keep children in a protective bubble, shielded from life's daily distractions so they might maintain that pure and wonderful innocence that children always possess?

As it happens, one of those youngsters is a special needs child who has had to cope with significant physical issues and countless operations, and yet, on this day, she was enjoying the pool as much as all of the other children. In less than a month, she will be starting middle school in a neighboring county; naturally, she and her parents are feeling a bit of apprehension about starting in a new school. Will her classmates in the new school treat her as one of the core group or will she be left on the outside of the core and not have a friend group? Will her teachers, support staff and administrators help her manage throughout the school year with many academic, social and emotional challenges that she will likely face? These are questions her parents, and perhaps all parents, contemplate before the start of (and during) any school year.

When classes begin here in Manhasset on Tuesday September 1, each of the students attending our schools will bring with them a unique personal story, just as the beautiful young girl referenced above will bring to her new school. Some of the students entering our schools may have similar concerns to hers, while others may be more fortunate because all is good in their lives and they feel comfortable and ready for the new year.

There is a wonderful song, “Don’t Laugh at Me,” written and sung by Mark Wills, which in its lyrics contains a very poignant anti-bullying message. Below are a portion of the lyrics of this song:

I’m a little boy with glasses  
The one they call the geek  
A little girl who never smiles  
‘Cause I’ve got braces on my teeth  
And I know how it feels to cry myself to sleep  
I’m that kid on every playground  
Who’s always chosen last...  
Don’t laugh at me, don’t call me names  
Don’t get your pleasure from my pain....

Manhasset is blessed with having a great student body and staff. But, as is true in any community, even with students who are mostly thoughtful and caring, there are instances when a student has had to experience pain as a result of some thoughtless or uncaring word or action from a classmate. Collectively, let’s all make a commitment to making a meaningful difference, so that all of our students can feel they are very special members of Munsey Park, Shelter Rock and the Secondary School families.

Charlie Cardillo