

Scary Guy leaves his mark on district

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Austin Public Schools has some new curriculum to look over. It's not academic, exactly — it's from The Scary Guy, so his anti-bullying messages can continue to be shared with students.

The Scary Guy visited Austin earlier this fall to work toward his mission of "the total elimination of hate, violence and prejudice worldwide." Brought to town by Community Against Bullying, he spoke with students, staff and community members.

Now, his curriculum is in the hands of the school district, approved earlier in December, and each building can determine how it will use it.

"The product is here in hand, and in my opinion, it's good stuff," said Dewey Schara, Neveln Elementary School principal.

Schara has started working with students at Neveln to present and review the curriculum with them because he said he thinks it's important for the students to hear the information from the building principal.

While there's no "magic bullet" to end bullying, Schara thinks the curriculum from The Scary Guy is directly designed to help individuals protect themselves. It's another angle to the Steps to Respect program already in the schools.

It's up to the schools to work toward what The Scary Guy started when he came to town and for the district to implement the curriculum, Schara said.

"The intent ... was to heighten awareness," Schara said. "It was not his responsibility to end bullying. It is our responsibility to end bullying.

"We have the obligation of implementing it."

At Southgate Elementary School, this curriculum will be used in addition to the Steps to Respect as well. Teachers will get a copy of the curriculum and they can decide what they will use, focusing on The Scary Guy's four rules (open one door a day for another person, ask permission before touching another person, say only positive things about others, address each other with appropriate names).

The school will probably also put up reminder posters around the building and designate times to talk about the rules, such as at monthly assemblies.

"We want to keep it in the forefront of people's minds," Principal Edwina Harder said. "It was, I think, a very important message he delivered.

"I think it's our job to really keep that movement going."

The special education department at Banfield Elementary School is the first group at the school to delve into the curriculum. After the holiday break, it will be made available to the teachers and playground staff for their use, said Principal Jeff Roland.

He said The Scary Guy curriculum is "another tool in the tool box," and it "dovetails nicely" with the school's Character Counts program, which is already strong. The key is to keep the message consistent with kids.

"It was worth the time for the kids to see it," Roland said of The Scary Guy's presentation.

There is no formal requirement for using the curriculum at Sumner Elementary School, though it's available if teachers would like it. One fourth-grade class has picked it up because the students took an interest in The Scary Guy and have communicated with him, Principal Sheila Berger said.

His message was similar to the current curriculum in use; he just had a "shock value" to him.

"We use the Steps to Respect for bullying, and we will continue to use that as a formal curriculum," Berger said. "I think what he had to say, none of it is new.

"It's more re-enforcement than anything else."