

Community Against Bullying looks to move forward with its mission

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Like probably many people and groups nationwide after Friday's shooting in Newtown, Conn., Community Against Bullying is looking for ways to work with other entities to make the community better for kids.

The group held its monthly meeting Tuesday at Neveln Elementary School to go over old and new business, but the shooting that left 26 dead at Sandy Hook Elementary was the topic that sparked a long discussion.

Aaron DeVries, a parent and webmaster for CAB, said he was nervous about sending his kids to school Monday morning. He was looking to the school district for a response on how it would deal with discussing the shooting in the schools.

"The school should be sending out something to parents to reassure them," DeVries said.

Sheri Willrodt, special services director for Austin Public Schools, was at the CAB meeting and said district officials discussed the shooting but decided not to send anything. There are different ways to look at it, she said.

Getting back to the bigger picture of what can be done in the wake of such a tragedy, CAB chairwoman Danielle Borgerson-Nesvold thought back to when The Scary Guy was in town last year and talked about stopping the cycle of hate. Then there's extending a hand to others and having kids do that, too.

"That would be just the great thing," Borgerson-Nesvold said. "Get on the preventative end of stuff.

"It's hard for kids to step across that line."

At the last CAB meeting, Austin High School counselor Thor Bergland started an in-depth discussion on mental wellness in the schools and trying to promote different community groups to work together to better understand the issues that need to be addressed.

DeVries was on the same page.

"Can CAB bridge somehow getting between the school and the community?" he asked. "We're kind of in our own silos. How do we engage the community so we're all looking out for each other?"

Borgerson-Nesvold wanted to find the answer to reaching those kids whose parents aren't as involved. Sometimes, it's just a simple hello or acknowledgment in a child's direction. That was the suggestion of Cynthia Hernandez, a therapist at Gerard Academy and a parent of three kids who have been in Austin Public Schools.

That thought received some strong agreement from the rest of the group.

"We just have to stress humanity again," Bergland said.

Neveln principal Dewey Schara offered a more practical suggestion for the group: contacting Mayo Clinic Health System in Austin to see what they do from a mental health standpoint. Sometimes it's hard to refer kids to get the help they need, he said. It would be the practical thing to do and ask, what could be done?

"Because we have mental health issues," Schara said. "They're rampant.

"And they want help. I've never met a parent that doesn't want their kid to thrive."

Bergland said now is the right time for the many assets in the community to pool their efforts to focus on the awareness and education pieces.

"We're very traditional," Bergland said. "You have to completely get out of your comfort zone. Be a leader and jump in."